

TO DEFEAT
THE ENDS
OF
JUSTICE
HERBERT
COMPTON

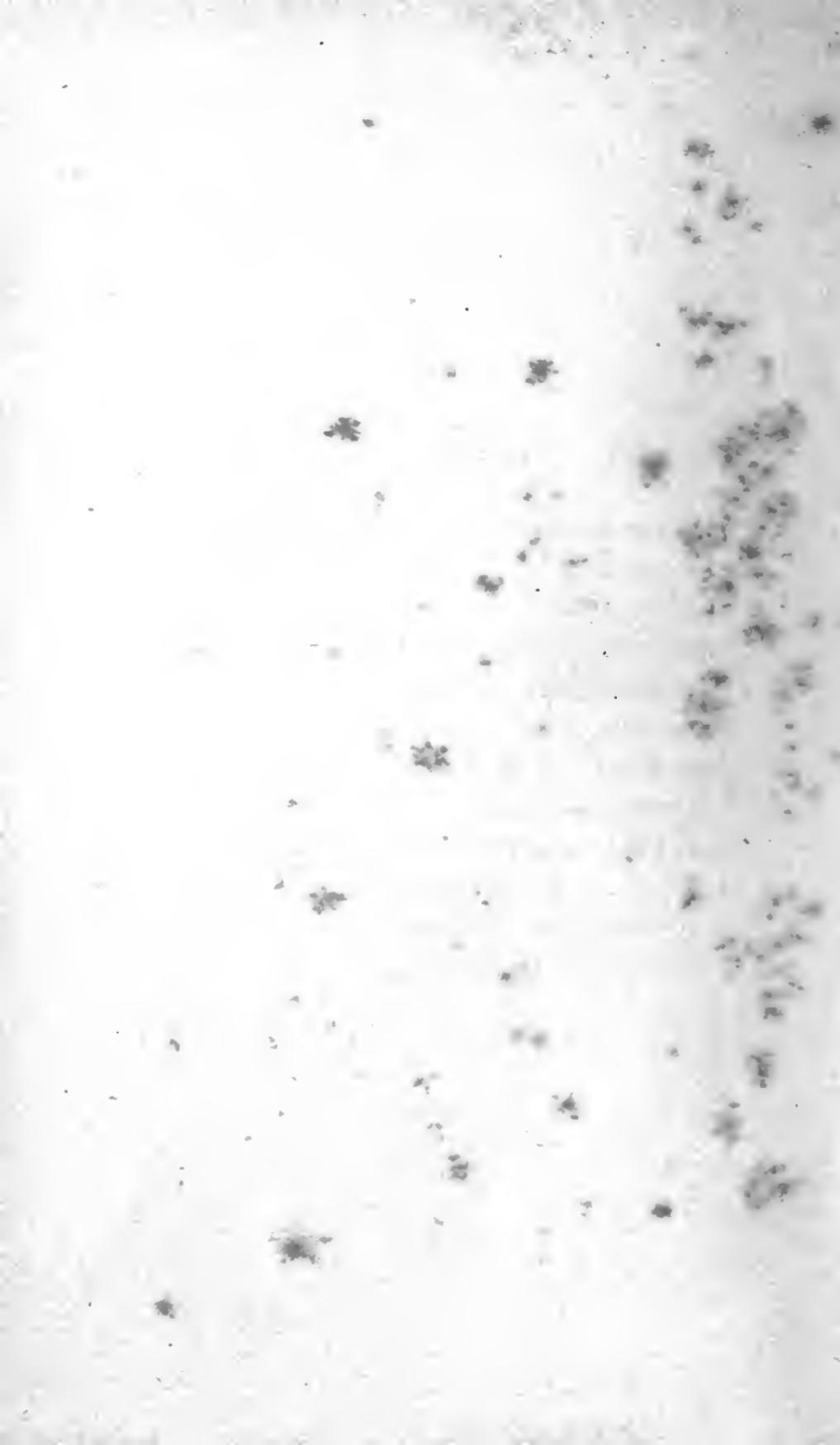
~~Age of Hyder~~

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE INIMITABLE MRS. MASSINGHAM.
THE WILFUL WAY.
THE PALACE OF SPIES.
THE QUEEN CAN DO NO WRONG.
THE DEAD MAN'S GIFT.
A MASTER MARINER.
THE MILITARY ADVENTURERS OF HINDUSTAN.
A KING'S HUSSAR.
A FREE LANCE IN A FAR LAND.
A FURY IN WHITE VELVET.
A SCOURGE OF THE SEA.
FACTS AND PHANTASIES OF A FOLIO-GRUB.



TO DEFEAT THE ENDS OF JUSTICE



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BY

HERBERT COMPTON

AUTHOR OF 'THE INIMITABLE MRS. MASSINGHAM,' ETC.



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1906

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. TWO SHATTERED LIVES	9
II. THE PERSONAL EQUATION	20
III. FOILING THE TRACK	33
IV. HIS EXCELLENCY FALOON	45
V. LILY WILLIS	56
VI. A PLEASANT ENTR'ACTE	67
VII. A PERIL OF THE SEA	79
VIII. DARK WATERS	91
IX. RESCUED!	103
X. HIS HIGHNESS	114
XI. THE RANEE ROSALIE	125
XII. PRENEZ GARDE!	137
XIII. A VILLAINOUS PROPOSAL	149
XIV. A WEEK'S REPRIEVE	161
XV. A POISONED CUSTARD APPLE	172
XVI. FIGHT AND FLIGHT!	184
XVII. DERELICT IN THE DESERT	197
XVIII. A DESPERATE PLIGHT	208
XIX. INTO THE DARK UNKNOWN	216
XX. THE CAMP IN THE DESERT	223
XXI. IN THE NAME OF THE LAW	232
XXII. OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE	242
XXIII. A WORD ABOUT RICHARD	253

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIV.	THE CLAIM OF BLOOD	264
XXV.	THE LAW ON THE SUBJECT	274
XXVI.	EDITH'S STORY	282
XXVII.	EDITH'S STORY INTERRUPTED	291
XXVIII.	LILY—WILLY-NILLY	298
XXIX.	CLEAR'S UP THE MYSTERY	306

CHAPTER I.

TWO SHATTERED LIVES.

She stood surveying herself critically in her cheval glass and leisurely putting the last touches to her evening toilet. The picture was as charming as man could wish. And of a truth Edith Carew desired to appear very charming this evening to one particular man who was going to escort her to a dance given in honour of their engagement, which had just been announced.

It had created the greatest interest amongst her circle of friends. For six months past two brothers—Richard and Robert Fawcitt—had been paying attentions to Miss Carew. Both were devoted admirers, and yet their rivalry had not affected their devotion to one another. It had been predicted their brotherly love could not stand the test, and that they would fall out over her. The prediction proved false. Richard, the elder, when he realised that his brother was the favoured man, accepted the situation. A sigh, a shake of the hand, and "God bless you, Bob," was all that passed between them. And the day after this story opens Richard Fawcitt was starting for a trip to the West Indies, in order that he might forget Edith if he could.

Edith was thinking of this, and of Richard, not unkindly, as she surveyed her tall, handsome figure

and her beautiful face framed with a wealth of dark hair that was a glory to gaze upon. Had there been no Robert Fawcitt—but there! speculations on the negative are vain, and with a sigh and a “Poor dear Dick,” she dismissed them, and wondered what Robert would think of her to-night.

“I think he will be proud of me,—and I think he ought to be,” was her final judgment of the picture in the cheval glass. “I am very glad I am not ugly. And I do hope that the voyage will do Dick good, and that he will not forget me. I should not like Dick to forget me.”

Again she gave a half-sigh. Then, looking at her watch, “If lovers are punctual, Robert ought to be here in a quarter of an hour. If they are ardently impatient he might be here now!”

At this moment there came a knock at the door, and the maid entered with a telegram. Edith opened and read it; “*Met with a misfortune. Come to my house instantly. Mention it to no one. Robert.*”

For a moment a feeling of faintness overcame her, but summoning her self-control, she read the message again, and turned to the maid.

“Alice, call a hansom,” she said in a voice that concealed her anxiety. The maid left the room and Edith, after scenting her handkerchief, and slipping a bottle of smelling salts into her pocket, went down to the drawing-room, where her aunt was sitting.

“Robert has telegraphed to say he is delayed, aunt; so I shall drive to Mrs. Hood’s and ask her to take me to the Musgrave’s. Can I do anything for you before I go?”

“How has Mr. Fawcitt been delayed?” asked the old lady with mild surprise and curiosity in her benevolent features.

“He does not say; I will let you know to-morrow morning. Good-night,” said Edith, as the

sound of a cab drawing up to the house was heard, and kissing the old lady, she departed.

"You need not wait up for me, Alice," she said to the maid. "I have got my latchkey, and I may be late. Tell the driver to go to Mrs. Hood's." The hansom drove off, but directly they were out of sight of the house, Edith re-directed the man to Robert Fawcitt's address.

"Met with a misfortune; mention it to no one." What did it mean? What could have happened. She racked her brains, and tried to dispel the undefined fear that seized her. When at last the hansom drew up at its destination, she sprang out, paid her fare, and was about to ring the bell, when the door opened, and she saw Robert Fawcitt shrinking back into the shadow behind it, his head enveloped in a bandage, and his left arm in a sling. He motioned her to be silent.

"Oh, Robert; what has happened? You are badly hurt?"

He caught her by the wrist, and whispered, in an agitated voice, "Come into my study. I will tell you. Do not make a noise."

They entered, and he closed the door. Then, with a sudden access of despair, "Edith," he cried, "I have sent for you, to tell you that something has happened which will part us for life."

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "Part us—part us! Oh, Robert!" and she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him, in a panic of surprise and agitation.

"For God's sake, don't," he cried, weakly, as he strove to push her back. "Don't make it harder. I have strung myself up to it."

"To it! To what? Tell me!"

"I do not know how to tell you. It is too terrible."

"Tell me instantly. Do you think anything can make any difference in my love for you? The truth cannot be so terrible as this suspense."

He disengaged her, for she was still clinging to him, and fell back a step or two, holding out his hands with a gesture to keep her off. Then, turning his head aside, in a sort of shamed despair, he said, "I have killed my partner Strickland!"

Edith heard the words, and saw his despairing demeanour; saw, heard, and realised. And then she began to sway slightly, and her eyes travelled to the couch. But, the next moment, it was into Robert's arms she threw herself, with the wail of a stricken woman.

Long moments passed in silence; moments into which were concentrated the bitter agony of two shattered lives.

"Tell me everything," she murmured at last. "I think I can listen."

He led her gently to the couch. She would have drawn him to her side; but he resisted; and, in the end, he was kneeling before her, as one who makes some dread confession.

"Tell me everything," she repeated, bending over him, and stroking his forehead with her gentle fingers. "My poor, poor Robert."

"Strickland was a villain," answered Robert, without any trace of passion. "I discovered it to-day. He has ruined the firm, and reduced me to beggary. I waited for him this evening, and we fought."

"You fought? Then, it was an accident?" she exclaimed.

"He attacked me—but there are no witnesses to prove it. I lost my head when—when it was over. I have done and said mad things." In his despair, and remorse, he buried his face in her lap. She bent

down and whispered into his ear, begging him to be brave, and not to give way. His weakness made her strong ; she assumed the lead, questioned him, and drew his story from him.

"Strickland did not turn up at the office this morning, but sent a telegram, to say he was ill. About noon, there came an express letter for him ; and, although it was marked 'Private'—as it was also marked 'Reply urgent'—I opened it. It revealed to me the fact that he had been engaged in the most ruinous speculations, in which he had pledged the firm's credit. I went immediately to the writer of the letter—a stockbroker—and heard from him such a story of reckless, secret speculation and folly as can scarcely be credited. It meant absolute ruin to the firm. Perhaps, I have been to blame. I have been neglecting my work these last two happy months."

Edith drew a short breath of pain. Then she took his hand in hers and kissed it, with mute eloquence.

"I am a beggar," he said.

"No, no ! Not while I have a penny. All mine is thine. You know that, Robert ; you know that."

He fluttered his hand in negation. Then, in response to the expectant look upon her face, he continued his narrative.

"I drove to Strickland's private residence. They told me he had started for the office, as usual, this morning, and was perfectly well. And they added that he had taken his valise with him, saying he was going down to the seaside for the week-end.

"Returning to the office, I forced the lock of his private desk. There I discovered a pocket-book, full of bank-notes and securities, the latter including many which I believed to be safely deposited in the custody of our bankers. That took me to the bank,

where I learnt the worst. Strickland had drawn out everything this morning. By what stupid oversight, or accident, he had left his pocket-book in his desk at the office, I cannot conceive. But there it was, and a brief examination of its contents convinced me that he would—he must—return for it. The question was—when? Probably after business hours. I determined not to leave the office until the building was finally locked up at 10 o'clock.

“I called the clerks together, and told them all that I had discovered; and I made a sort of speech, denouncing Strickland, and vowing that I would be even with him yet. I have only a vague recollection of what I raved, but I know there were all sorts of mad predictions and wild threatenings. My words will be remembered and brought up against me.”

He passed his hand over his wounded forehead—as though his brain were tortured, and he could not remember the sequence of events.

Edith was marvellously calm now. She seemed to gather courage as he lost his. It was clear that, in his present shattered state of nerves, everything depended upon her. Woman-like, flight was the first idea that suggested itself. She determined to urge, and aid him, to escape.

“Robert,” she said, “precious time is passing. Be brave, and tell me what is to be told. We have to act.”

He glanced at her, questioningly; and it was evident he was struck by the phrasing of her words. It would be too much to say that hope returned to him; but there was a recovery in his voice, as he continued his story.

“The clerks left at five o'clock, and I pretended to leave, too, locking the office on the outside with my private key. A little later, I crept back, let myself in quietly, and crouched, on the watch, behind

the door of our inner office, close to where the electric switch is placed. Half an hour later, there was a faint click at the door, and Strickland stole in. I feared he might turn on the light; but the villain was too cunning for that. He carried one of those little electric hand-lights, giving just a gleam, which pierced towards the direction of his desk. He had left the door open, and it hid me from his line of sight. Drawing out his keys from his pocket, he fumbled at the lock. The next moment, he realised that the drawer had been forced; and an involuntary exclamation of anger escaped him. With a press of my finger, I flooded the room with a blaze of light, and stepped forward.

“‘Hullo!’ he cried, trying to brazen it out. ‘You here, Fawcitt?’

“‘Yes, to catch you,’ I retorted.

“His hand flashed into his pocket; and, without another word, he sprang upon me with a life-preserver.

“What followed happened in seconds. Strickland aimed a blow at me, and I protected myself with my left arm. Another blow I partially warded off; but it reached my forehead, and brought blood. That maddened me. He attempted to escape—dashed towards the door. I tripped him up, wrenched the life-preserver from his hand, and brought it down, crash, upon his skull. There was a dreadful thud, and he rolled over on the floor. One look at his face, and I dropped the weapon. Oh, my God, shall I ever forget? I had killed him.”

He broke away from Edith, rose to his feet, and began pacing the room. But she was by his side in a moment, comforting and soothing him.

With an effort, he continued his narrative. “I staggered to my feet, extinguished the electric light, locked the door, and fled. Not until I got outside

did I realise how severely I had been wounded. People stared at me; and, glancing down, I perceived blood streaming over the front of my clothes. I hailed a hansom, and ordered the man to drive to the nearest doctor. The cold air revived me a little; and, by the time he pulled up, I was in sufficient command of myself to realise the gravity of my position and answer the doctor's questions."

"Is your arm broken?" asked Edith, in great concern.

"No; only fractured. It ought to be right in about a month, the doctor said. But I have a nasty wound on my forehead. Another half-inch, and Strickland would have been the murderer!" he said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile.

"Hush! It was a fair fight."

"Before Heaven, a fair fight!—but I cannot prove it. And I was still so dazed at the doctor's that I fear I spoke foolishly. He asked me all sorts of questions, and I concocted an imaginary story of having been assaulted and robbed by a gang of roughs. He wanted me to stay, but I said my wife would be anxious! I was in a panic, and invented replies, and they will rise up against me."

"Oh, Robert, Robert!"

"I was dazed, I tell you. I am dazed even now. And, when I reached home, there was Mrs. Strong, my housekeeper, who came fussing around me, the inquisitive old bore, wanting to know what had happened, and how it had happened, and where it had happened, and when it had happened. I told her the same story, with variations."

"And where is Mrs. Strong?"

"Gone to bed, and the girl, too. She retired in a state of hysterics. I burst out at her, in the end, and she probably thinks I am drunk."

"Robert, when—when will it be discovered?" asked Edith, clasping her hands, frantically.

"I do not think before to-morrow morning, when they go in to clean up the office."

"Have you formed any plan of escape?"

He shook his head, moodily. "None. I do not seem to be able to collect my ideas, and think. But," he added, in a brighter voice, and tapping the breast of his coat, "I have got the pocket-book, and there is a large sum of money in it. Of course, I must catch one of the midnight trains. But I could not leave without telling you, Edith."

"Leave, Robert—injured like this?" cried Edith. "You are not fit to go by yourself. Oh, let me think! It is so sudden, so dreadful! What can I do?" She pressed her hands to her temples, and tried to concentrate her ideas.

Robert glanced at the clock. "I have money, and ten hours' start. If it were not for this blow on the head—"

"You have money, and ten hours' start." she echoed, still pressing her hands to her temples. "Oh, much, much can be done in ten hours, with money. How much have you got, Robert?"

He drew a pocket-book out, and emptied its contents upon the table. A paper remained, stuck in one of the compartments.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "what's this? I did not see this before. A letter for 'Darcy Barrington.' Who is he?"

He extracted the contents of the envelope, and examined them. "Why, here is a steamer ticket for Port Said, made out in the name of Darcy Barrington. Whew! Mr., Mrs., and Miss Darcy Barrington! What does the covering letter say?" He glanced through it rapidly. "The cunning rogue.

He had his plans all cut and dried. It is clear where he was going to."

Edith was examining the envelope. It was addressed to "c/o Mr. Snell, Suffolk-street," and she asked, "Who is Mr. Snell?"

"Snell? Snell? Why he is Strickland's tobacconist. Ah, I see. He took his passage under a false name, and had the tickets sent to Snell's address. But who are Mrs. and Miss Barrington? Why did he take passages for three persons?" asked Robert, perplexedly.

Edith's sharp, womanly wit had already solved the riddle. "The family is imaginary," she declared, with conviction. "This was a cunning ruse to hoodwink pursuit. A fugitive does not incommodate himself with two ladies. There might have been one, but two—never! And, Robert—see, see, the steamer sails to-morrow. Here is a means of escape ready to your hands."

He took the papers from her and read them again carefully. "By heaven you are right," he cried. "A ticket taken before—before to-night. Taken in a false name, and sent to a false address. It is a miracle! It is the hand of Providence! The ticket—the name—reaching me just at this moment! But," he checked himself, "suppose the woman, the women are up at Liverpool waiting for him?"

"They cannot sail without the ticket, and certainly will not sail without him. If there is a risk, you must face it. It is trivial compared to—to the other risk."

He stood looking at her, bewildered and incredulous. Then a revulsion of feeling overcame him, his eyes began to waver, his hands to beat the air, and Edith realised that he was on the point of fainting.

She guided him to the couch, applied her smelling salts to his nostrils, and fanned him. In a little while he recovered.

"Forgive me," he whispered. "I felt dizzy and overcome. I thought I saw—hope."

"There *is* hope," she cried insistently. "More than hope."

He shook his head sadly. "I was not thinking of mere escape. It was of you I was thinking. What are life and liberty worth to me without you?"

She gazed at him tensely for a moment, with a great love in her eyes.

"Robert—come with me to—to your brother's."

"To Dick? Oh, no—no. Not you and I to Dick. Edith, you know he loves you. He gave you up to me."

"I know," she answered, colouring, "your brother loves me. I will rely on that love. I—I have an idea in my mind to save you; only I dare not make the decision myself. I can trust Richard. Richard is a true man, a strong man. Richard shall decide. Come with me to Richard."

CHAPTER II.

THE PERSONAL EQUATION.

EDITH and Robert hailed the first cab they met, and drove to the top of the street in which Richard Fawcitt's flat was situated. There they alighted and made their way to the building on foot. "I will prepare him," said Edith. "You must not be seen entering. Walk up and down here in the shadow, and I will come for you."

She rang the bell, and a woman answered the door. "Which is Mr. Fawcitt's flat?" she asked.

"The top but one, ma'am. I will show you up."

"There is no occasion; I will find my way. I want to see him before he sails to-morrow." She drew out her purse, slipped a florin into the woman's hand, and ran upstairs.

A couple of portmanteaux, ready for removal, stood by Dick's open door. She caught sight of him standing in front of the fireplace of his sitting-room. He was lost in a reverie, gazing into the fire, and his handsome, clean-shaven face was sad as the flames flickered upon it. Entering without his hearing, she stole to his side and called him by his name.

He turned with a start and recognised her. "Edith!" he exclaimed in a tone of incredulous amazement.

She held up a warning finger, cautiously closed the door, and moved towards the table in the centre

of the room. Her face was pale and her eyes haggard. She did not know how to begin. Her cloak slipped from her shoulders and disclosed her evening costume, and the lamplight gleamed on her fair white shoulders.

Dick was astounded. She was the last person in the world he expected in his rooms to-night.

At last she broke the silence ; "Are you alone ?"

"Yes ; what is it, Edith ?" he asked in a whisper as low as her own.

"An awful thing has happened. Oh, Dick, Robert is in desperate danger, and you must help and advise me !"

"Robert in *danger* ?" he cried. "What do you mean ?"

"Mr. Strickland has ruined him. It was discovered to-day, and they came to blows."

"I hope Bob thrashed him well ?"

"Oh, don't, don't ! Robert has killed him !"

"What ! *Killed* him !" was all Dick could gasp.

"Killed him," repeated Edith, breaking down and sobbing. "They had a fight, and Robert has been injured. Oh, Dick, Dick, what shall I do ?" And she flung herself into a chair and gazed piteously into his face.

"Where is Bob ?"

"He is outside. I was afraid the housekeeper might see and recognise him. I will go and bring him if you will keep the front door open."

They descended the stairs noiselessly, and Dick let Edith out, and waited. The shock of this appalling news was terrible. Robert, his brother, who was engaged to Edith, had killed his partner ! It changed the whole scheme and current of their lives.

Footsteps sounded, and his brother and Edith came in. Without a word they ascended the stairs,

entered Dick's flat, and gathered round the table.

"You have heard, Dick?" said Robert, in a hollow voice.

"Is it true? Have you—" his lips refused to frame the words.

"It is true," said Robert, with the brevity of despair. "Will you help a murderer to evade the law?"

"Help you, Bob? Help my brother? Do you think I could desert you, and—and Edith?" cried Dick, impulsively.

"Dear Dick," whispered Edith, gratefully. "I told Robert so. I knew you would help. All is arranged, and you—"

"All is arranged?" queried Dick, incredulously.

"Listen," said Edith. "First to Robert, and then to me. There is no time to lose. Quick, Robert; tell Dick everything."

"Yes, that is necessary. Tell me everything."

Whereupon Robert related his story briefly, whilst Edith stood by Dick, fathoming the workings of his mind and watching the pathetic eagerness in his handsome eyes.

When his brother had finished, Dick stood cogitating for some minutes. Then he said, decisively:

"You ought to face it out, Bob. If you fly you convict yourself."

"Face it out!" cried Bob. "I can't. I have engulfed myself. I threatened to kill him twenty times—to my clerks, to the bank manager, to that broker. There is my hat; I have left that in the office. I have told people I was assaulted and robbed by a gang of roughs. I have laid a circumstantial track of guilt behind me. I am enmeshed. How can I explain?"

"And how can you escape? You are a marked man with your head in that bandage and your arm

in a sling. You advertise yourself wherever you go. It would be safer to hide than to try and run for it."

"Hide! Where! There is no hiding in London," declared Robert, hopelessly.

Again Dick cogitated. "There are Armstrong's rooms upstairs. He is abroad, and I have charge of his keys. It might be possible——"

"Oh, no, no!" broke in Edith, affrighted at the suggestion. "It would be madness. Here is escape open to Robert. He will want looking after, care, nursing, his injuries attending to——"

"And who is going to do all this?" asked Dick, starting.

"Who else but I?" cried Edith.

"You! Impossible!" exclaimed Dick, falling back in dismay.

"Never! This is a new idea. I had no suspicion of this when Edith asked me to come to you, Dick," cried Robert, hastily.

"It is why I have brought you here, Robert." Edith told him; "to make Dick persuade you." Then turning to Dick, "He is not fit to go by himself. I can be Mrs. Barrington—at least, at least, I can be his sister, Miss Barrington. Oh, Robert, let me go with you, my darling. Let it be for better or for worse!" She moved quickly to his side, devotion and yearning in her eyes. "You want me Robert, and I can save you. I WILL save you. Let me come."

There was a pathetic earnestness in her appeal, and it was followed by a pregnant silence. The brothers stood apart, not daring to look at one another; and Robert began to tremble visibly. Edith turned to Dick.

"Dear, dear Dick, persuade him! You have only to say the word and he will be guided."

Dick was very pale. It was a monstrous self-

sacrifice she proposed. He made no reply. Edith moved closer to him.

"If you love me, Dick, help us to go together."

Dick glanced at his brother, and saw that he was wavering.

He attempted to temporise. The decision lay with him alone. He could see that in Robert's haggard eyes, now wistfully searching his.

In the minds of both the brothers, unconsciously, the same thought was framing itself; if Edith accompanied Robert, he would marry her; if she stayed behind, they would never marry; and they both looked to Dick to make the decision for them. So he temporised.

"Let us consider matters," he found himself suggesting mechanically. "Let us argue you have got off safely and reached some foreign port. What are you going to do then?"

"There are several places where one can start a new life."

"What places?"

"I was reading the other day of the Seychelle Islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean where a steamer calls only once a month. You can get there from Bombay. There is a fortune to be made in vanilla. A little capital is all that is needed."

"Could you get there?"

"Yes. And I have capital."

"Oh, let us go to the Seychelles," pleaded Edith, impulsively. "Some beautiful tropical island away in the middle of the sea. It would be Heaven after this dreadful night. Let us go and lose ourselves. Oh, Dick, dear Dick, consent to it and help us!"

Dick looked keenly at Robert and waited for him to speak; waited until he did speak.

"Dick," cried the wretched man at last, "I am not a murderer. I killed this man, but it was in fair

self-defence. Only I cannot prove it, and the law will hold me guilty, and hang me. Morally I am not less worthy of Edith than I was yesterday. If—if I get to the Seychelles, what would Edith—?' He came to a lame halt, and looked timorously towards her.

"He has only me left, Richard," she cried. "You stand between your brother and death, or at least a life worse than death. I tell you I can save him. I have confided in you, trusted in you. Speak!"

The perspiration stood in beads on Richard's brow. He saw things shaping themselves as they should not be shaped. He had but to say, "No, this shall not be!" and Edith would be spared. But then Robert had won her from him; was he, who had lost her, to pronounce their separation? Would it be duty or desire that prompted him? That was what it came to when he searched his naked soul. There was the Personal Equation, and in fear of its influence he allowed his judgment to be warped.

At last he spoke. "Go—*together*," was all he said.

Edith came towards him, and putting a hand, one on each shoulder, lifted up her face and kissed him. "To the end of my life, dear Dick, I will pray God to bless you for this. Look at him," she whispered, as Robert sank weakly upon the couch, "I *must* go with him. He may break down at any moment. It is a matter of life and death."

"Go—*together*," repeated Dick.

There was an accent of finality in his tone, and Edith accepted it as such. And now she changed from the pleading to the practical woman. "What is the time?" she asked.

"It wants a quarter to eleven."

"And the trains for Liverpool?"

"It is too late for the midnight one. There is one at five."

"I will go home and change my dress and get a few things, and be back by midnight. Robert," she whispered, bending over him, "I will save you. Be brave, my Robert. We will go together—you and I—to those beautiful islands. We will be happy yet."

And the next instant she was gone.

Silence followed her departure. Dick's eyes were fixed on his brother, who had not attempted to rise from the couch. He presented a sombre picture, his head bound up in a black silk scarf, and his black beard, trimmed in neat, naval style, completing the funereal framing of his colourless cheeks and lack-lustre eyes—the picture of a man dazed and demoralised.

"Robert!"

"Hullo!" the response came in a dull, leaden voice.

Dick stepped to a side table, poured out a glass of brandy, and carried it to his brother. "Drink this, Bob."

Robert gulped it down and rose from the couch. "Dear old Dick, I knew you would stick by me! I am all right again now. I felt half moribund till you gave me that brandy. I can go through with it. You must give me some clothes; and this beard of mine—I will shave it off. No one will be able to recognise me then. Confound this arm, I forgot that! You will have to be barber, Dick!"

They passed into the adjoining room. Dick lit candles, and seated Robert in a chair before the mirror.

"What a wreck I look," ejaculated Robert.

"Never mind what you look. Don't look! Hold your chin up," said Dick, beginning his task with a pair of scissors.

There was a short silence, broken only by the snip, snip.

"What a woman Edith is!" burst from Robert, reflectively. "Did you ever hear of such a noble, devoted woman, Dick?"

Dick did not answer the question, but proceeded with his task. Five minutes passed without a word spoken. Then, as the idea occurred to him, he said, "We must make some arrangements for communicating, Bob. Are you going to Bombay?"

"Yes, I think so. So far as I can foresee at present."

"You must adopt a name; don't stick to Barrington longer than you can help. Choose a new name now."

"Will 'Bolt' do?" asked Robert, with a feeble smile.

"Yes. You are 'Bolt'—'Robert Bolt, care of Cook & Sons, Bombay.' Remember that. Make arrangements for letters to be forwarded. It may be a long time, for I shall not write until I get to Jamaica."

"Are you going abroad now, Dick?"

"Yes, it is best I should go. They might come here to ask questions, and an empty flat is the best answer. If I put off my departure, they might think it was connected with you. Everyone knows I am sailing to-morrow."

"Then, how shall I communicate with you, Dick?"

Dick cogitated. "It won't do for you to write to me here, or even to write to me by my proper name. They may watch for letters. Look here; you address your letters to 'Richard Lock, care of Armstrong,' in the flat above. I will arrange that they are forwarded."

He broke off, and surveyed his brother's face.

"There, I don't believe Edith will know you, when she comes back. Now, let me bandage your forehead again, Bob. Is it very bad, old chap?"

"It's awfully bad. I get a dizzy sensation every now and again, and feel as though I were floored. I would give a thousand pounds to be safe on the steamer. Suppose—suppose I jack up, Dick?" he asked, faintly.

"Suppose nothing of the sort. It's buck up, you must."

"Yes, I must. Give me another glass of brandy, Dick," said Robert, making no attempt to rise from the chair.

Dick brought him one, and looked at him, keenly and calculatingly, as he drank it off.

"Dick, suppose I jack up?" repeated Robert. "Suppose, suppose I collapse. What would happen to Edith?"

"Don't put that question to me, Bob."

"But I must, Dick, I must."

"Edith says she can save you. She knows the task—the risk. She has accepted it."

"Tell me the exact risk to her. I am not clear in my head. I know your opinion; you think I ought not to allow her to come with me. But *she* wants to; and, if she didn't, it would cut me off from her for ever. You see that, Dick, don't you? Cut me off from her for ever!"

"For ever," echoed Dick.

"My God! I cannot stand that thought," cried Robert. "She is my only hope. She says she can save me."

Dick was busy, packing clothes into a valise for his brother, and bent down, to hide his troubled face. For he was ashamed to think that Robert could do this thing. And then he heard his brother's voice, questioning him again.

"What would happen, if—if we do not get clear, Dick? If I broke down? If we missed the steamer? If—if we were taken?"

"Edith would be an accessory after the fact," replied Dick, decisively; "she would stand in the same dock with you."

"No, no, no!" cried Robert, stung to the quick by the obvious reply. "You misapprehend. I am not a murderer. We fought fair. He attacked me first. What I did was in self-defence."

"It would be too late for explanation, if you and Edith were apprehended in flight together. The time to explain is *now*. The time to save Edith is *now*. The time to prove yourself a man——" he broke off, with a choke of stern repression, and gulped down the bitter words on the tip of his tongue.

Robert sat listening, with a scared and agitated face, and, when his brother stopped, midway, in his speech, rose from his chair and approached him. Dick faced round; and, for a moment, they stood, confronting each other with a tragic intensity of demeanour and expression.

"Dick," implored Robert, in a tone of human appeal, "tell me what my duty to Edith is. I know you love her, Dick. Loving her, and knowing what this decision means to her and to me—on your sacred honour, tell me, what is my duty towards Edith?"

Dick moistened his lips.

"You press me too hard," he said; "you introduce the personal equation——"

"It is the dominant equation," whispered Robert, and waited.

"Do you wish me to answer you?"

"I insist upon your answering me. I call upon you—my brother, and my rival—to answer me, as man to man."

"Your duty to Edith is to leave her, and never see her again until you are purged of this stain."

Robert's face grew grim. With a smothered

curse, he passed into the sitting-room, whither Dick followed with the valise. Striding to the table, Robert poured out half a tumbler of brandy, and gulped it down.

"And you," he cried, in a tone of contained irony, turning on Dick, "what is going to be *your* duty to Edith?"

Under his sombre bandage, his eyes gleamed fiercely, and his shaven face was as pallid as death. There was a newly-awakened distrust in his expression, and it touched his brother to the quick.

"My duty to Edith is to remember that she is my brother's wife until death."

"Even though we are not married?"

"Until death," repeated Dick, with an air of finality.

"It is beyond human power—where a man loves a woman," declared Robert, impetuously. "If I go alone, it is giving her up to you."

"You wrong me foully," cried Dick. "You wrong and insult her and me, Robert. It was the knowledge that I love Edith, and my loyalty to you, that extorted from me an assent to her proposition, against my better judgment. And for you—you do not love her. You cannot love her, or you would never allow her to make this sacrifice."

"I do not love her!" echoed Robert, with a hysterical laugh; "and you do! I see the under-current of reasoning—the comparison you would draw in your soul. You would have me leave her, because I am so unworthy to you who are so worthy. You would have me not see her again until I am purged of this stain, which you know can never be. You would separate us. You would shatter our lives. And in time—in time——"

"Stop, stop," cried Dick. "Do not try me beyond endurance. It is clear that you know nothing

of the moral law which is stronger than the written code."

"But the law of circumstance is stronger than all."

"For such a creature as you it is. You prove it by your action at this hour. But the moral law compels where the written laws cannot—only that is beyond your comprehension. There is a limit which conscience imposes on our acts."

"There is no limit in love," declared Robert, with sweeping conviction.

"Not in such love as yours," blazed out Dick, suddenly, no longer able to master his feelings. "Yours is but a pretence of love. Love, forsooth! It is selfishness and cowardice that could drag Edith into this deadly peril. There is no moral restraint for such a nature as yours. It is beyond your comprehension. You cannot understand me. I tell you, that if you spare Edith this sacrifice, you place between her and me an obstacle insuperable. You would make her my sister."

"No, no," retorted Robert, shaking his head. "There is only one way to make her your sister: one safe way, one legal way!" Then, as he saw Dick turn aside anguish-stricken, a sudden wave of repentance surged over him, and he cried out, "Oh, Dick, she is all I have left in the world. See, the clock is five minutes to twelve. She is due; coming of her own free will and wish. Do not stand between her and me! And oh, Dick, forgive me if I have said anything I ought not to have said. Remember there is but this one star of hope in all the black firmament that now shadows my life!"

Wheels sounded from the street; a cab drove up, and Dick lifted the valise.

"I keep my promise," he said, "but when you

have passed out of this house, I shall cease to regard you as my brother."

He stepped to the door, but even as he did so, a bitter cry burst from Robert. He fell back on the couch, and Dick heard the words:—

"I can't do it, Dick. I can't do it. Bring Edith up."

CHAPTER III.

FOILING THE TRACK.

THE SS. *Thessaly*, outward bound for Calcutta, was anchored in mid-stream off Birkenhead, waiting for her pilot. It was within a quarter of an hour of her advertised time of sailing.

A little launch came puffing up with the last of her passengers, and amongst them a clean-shaven man, with his head bandaged and his left arm in a sling. There was a newsboy on the launch who carried a bundle of the early editions of the Liverpool papers. The man with the bandaged head bought one, and was soon intently absorbed in its pages. On reaching the steamer, he folded the paper, slid it into his breast-pocket, ascended the gangway with a rather dull, invalid air, and made straight for the cabins.

“Let me see, sir,” said the steward, to whom he presented his ticket. “One gent and two ladies. Ah, yes; ladies in No. 17 and you next door. Where’s the ladies’ luggage, sir?”

“My mother and sister have been prevented from sailing,” explained the passenger, who was booked under the name of Barrington. “We had a motor smash, and they’re coming overland, and will join me in Egypt. I wish I could have postponed my own journey; but my business is urgent.”

In the hurry and bustle of departure, the explanation was a little long and superfluous.

"I suppose you'll take the empty cabin, sir?" asked the steward.

"Certainly, as I've paid for it."

"Where's your baggage, sir?"

"I've only this valise."

The steward placed it on the settee, in the cabin, and turned to go; but Mr. Barrington detained him.

"Look here, steward, I'm a very bad sailor. You must look after me. I don't suppose I shall show my nose on deck this side of Gibraltar. Here's a sovereign for you" (he slipped one into his hand) "and there'll be another at the end of the voyage. I am going to turn in at once, for I feel a bit of a wreck."

"Thank you, sir. You shan't want for my best attention. I'll just settle my other passengers, and come back and make you comfortable."

Left to himself, Mr. Barrington locked the door, undressed, and lay down in his berth, having previously deposited a bulky pocket-book under his pillow. Then he opened out the evening paper again, and carefully read and re-read the following paragraph:

"SENSATIONAL TRAGEDY IN THE CITY
OF LONDON.

"(From Our Own Correspondent.)

"At seven o'clock this morning, the caretaker attached to the offices of Messrs. Strickland and Fawcitt was horrified to discover the body of Mr. Strickland lying on the floor of the inner office, with his head shockingly mutilated. The unfortunate man was still breathing, and was at once removed to the hospital, where he is reported to be slowly sinking. There seems to be little doubt but that he was

the victim of a murderous attack. It is alleged that he had a quarrel with his partner, Mr. Robert Fawcitt, yesterday, and a hat, belonging to the latter gentleman, was found on the floor of the office. Mr. Fawcitt returned to his residence last night, with his head enveloped in bandages and his arm in a sling, and left shortly afterwards, and has not since been heard of."

"Still breathing," murmured Mr. Barrington, to himself. "Not a murderer yet. Only guilty of assault—until he dies."

He appeared to derive a spurious consolation from the reflection, for he repeated,

"Not a murderer—yet." And added, "I'll never look at another paper. I'll live in the knowledge that the last I heard of Strickland, he was alive."

He lay a-thinking, with a troubled look on his handsome face, until the thud of the revolving screw aroused him to the fact that the *Thessaly* was starting. Just then came a knock at the door. Hastily hiding the paper, he clambered out of his berth, unlocked the door, and the steward entered.

"And now, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I want to send a telegram off."

For a reply, the steward produced a form.

"Pilot won't leave till the evening, sir. There's plenty of time."

"I shall probably be sea-sick then, so I'll write it now," was the reply, as Mr. Barrington filled in the form with the message;

"All well. Splendid steamer. Carry out programme. Ever yours till we meet. Robert."

And he addressed it to Miss Edith Carew, at her home.

"See that is sent off, steward."

"You're looking mighty bad, sir? Wouldn't you like to see the surgeon?"

"No, no," came the hurried answer, rather testily spoken. "I am only a bit sore and shaken. Don't make a fuss about it. I don't believe in doctors, and certainly not in ship's doctors. None of them for me! You know what I told you. You've got to look after me. Don't let anyone else bother me."

"Very good, sir," answered the steward, with the accommodating civility of his class, as he withdrew.

"And now for a week on the flat of my back!" groaned Mr. Barrington, with a grimace. "I wonder how many of those cursed papers there are on board. What a confounded bit of bad luck!"

To make his enforced retreat harder to bear the weather was beautifully fine, and the sea as calm as a mill-pond during the whole of the first week, during which time Mr. Barrington never stirred out of his cabin. For a couple of days he lived on the slops that compose the dietary of an invalid, until a sense of starvation supervened ; and then he demanded ordinary food, and much of it, and aided its digestion with several cigarettes. Which being observed, the doctor and purser came to pay him a formal visit on the fifth day—the former to see what was the matter with him ; the latter to ask for his ticket. He declined the attentions of the one, and satisfied the requirements of the other ; and dismissed them both with a few brusque, grumpy words, delivered from the depths of the bedclothes, as of a man outraged in his own castle.

"What a surly brute," commented the doctor, as they left the cabin. "I believe he's shamming. The steward tells me he eats four square meals every day, and smokes a dozen cigarettes!"

"He's a mysterious Johnny," was the purser's verdict. "Booked two women with him, and they

haven't come, and he has made no application for a rebate of passage-money!"

"I'll have him out of that cabin," said the doctor. "If he doesn't get up to-morrow, I'll give orders for it to be scoured out the next day. It's not wholesome."

Sanitation was the doctor's province; and, two days later, he issued the order, which had the effect of compelling Mr. Barrington temporarily to evacuate his cabin, whether he wished to do so or not. As a fact, he was mightily glad to get up on deck, where his sudden appearance created some sensation; for the very means the "eccentric recluse"—as he had come to be called—had selected to avoid notice, had exercised just the opposite effect, and he had become an object of curiosity.

The character for surliness, which the doctor and purser had given him, did not encourage anyone to address Mr. Barrington, who was left severely alone, in the isolation he had courted. But, at the same time, he was painfully aware that he attracted a good deal of observation and remark, as he paced the deck uneasily, and endeavoured to put on an unconscious air. It made him feel very uncomfortable, and he retreated to his cabin again as soon as it was ready for him.

The next morning, the *Thessaly* was timed to arrive at Algiers, where it was going to coal; and the conversation at dinner, which Mr. Barrington attended for the first time in the saloon, was all about going ashore. Parties were being made up, and plans discussed, and everyone seemed happy and cheerful, saving himself. He felt in a particularly gloomy mood when he went up on deck, after the meal, to smoke a solitary cigar in the dark.

The spot he selected was just aft of the smoking saloon, one window of which was open; and, as he

sat there, he could catch fragments of the conversation from within. Suddenly, he heard a voice, asking,

“Hullo, where did this turn up from?”

“What is it, Mac?”

“Why, the Liverpool evening paper of the day we sailed! The very latest news, by George! Let’s see what the telegrams say.”

And then, to Mr. Barrington’s horror, the speaker began to read aloud an account of the assault on Mr. Strickland!

Mr. Barrington rose from his seat, stealthily moved a step nearer the window, and peeped in. Half-a-dozen men were collected round the one who was reading the account, somewhat dramatically. And when he came to the passage about Mr. Fawcitt having his head enveloped in bandages, and his arm in a sling, a man, with an aggressive red beard, broke in,

“By jingo! Bandaged head! Arm in sling! Why, we’ve got all that on board! That’s our ‘Man of Mystery’!”

There was a loud laugh at the suggestion, which was taken as a joke, much to Mr. Barrington’s relief.

“You keep an eye on him, when he lands at Port Said, Sinclair,” said a young subaltern, who was shuffling a pack of cards. “Perhaps there will be a reward out for him—dead or alive, oh!”

“You bet I will,” said Sinclair. “He’s tickled my curiosity. I came aboard with him in the launch, and it struck me there was something fishy about the man then. I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if he was doing a skedaddle. He just disappeared from sight, like a rat, when we got on board, and I never clapped eyes on him again till to-day. And the doctor says he’s been no more ill than I have!”

"Come along, and let's start a game of Nap," called out another man, impatiently; and the paper was tossed aside, carelessly.

But Mr. Sinclair took the trouble to possess himself of it, and put it in his pocket, with a knowing shake of his head.

Mr. Barrington waited to hear and see no more. He backed away cautiously from the window, and stole down below, to his cabin, with an unconcealed air of agitation. There, he locked the door, and sat down on the settee in anxious cogitation, whilst he mopped the perspiration that was beading his forehead. In his mind was photographed the picture of the man with the red beard, pocketing that Liverpool paper—a man who lived at Port Said.

The next morning early the *Thessaly* reached Algiers where the passengers were allowed four hours ashore. Everyone went, but everyone did not return. One passenger was missing—Mr. Barrington.

He saw her depart, and no sooner was she out of the harbour than he went on board a small steamer which was sailing that afternoon for Gibraltar. From her deck he watched the *Thessaly* until she was hull down on the horizon, congratulating himself on his escape. As it happened, at the very moment he was doing so, a cablegram was being handed to the superintendent at Scotland Yard acquainting him of a suspicious passenger on board the *Thessaly*, who was booked for Port Said under the name of Darcy Barrington. The sender strongly suspected he was Robert Fawcitt, the assailant of Mr. Strickland, and suggested that a detective should be despatched overland to meet the steamer at Port Said, and the message concluded with a short description of Mr. Barrington's personal appearance.

Wherefore it was a happy thing that Mr. Barrington had not only departed the *Thessaly*, but this mundane life as well, for the gentleman who subsequently stepped ashore at Gibraltar, with his arm in a sling and his head in bandages, and who had no luggage with him, was no longer Mr. Barrington. The circumstances of his arriving in such a casual and incomplete style caused him to be regarded with some suspicion when he engaged a room at the hotel, but he airily explained matters by saying he had missed his steamer at Algiers, owing to a carriage accident in one of the ramshackle vehicles of the place, when he was out driving to see the various sights. In proof of which he pointed to his arm and bandaged head, and relieved himself of some exceedingly strong language about Algerian Jehus.

Then he went on to explain he was on his way to Calcutta and must get there within a certain time, which left it out of the question for him to stay at Algiers; so he had taken a steamer that was just starting for Gibraltar in the hope of catching the P. and O. mail boat. And he wound up by tendering a ten-pound note to the hotel keeper, which was the very best introduction that worthy could desire. He was accordingly welcomed as a guest, and wrote his name in the hotel book as "Septimus Strickland!"

It was an audacious move, and yet in its way a stroke of genius. The idea of a murderer in flight assuming the name of the man he had murdered was something outside the realms of probability. Notwithstanding it was about the safest one such an unfortunate wretch could assume, if he had the nerve to carry it off.

In this particular instance it was necessity rather than any excess of nerve which compelled the expedient. In that pocket-book of which mention has

been made, there were circular notes to the value of several hundred pounds drawn in Mr. Strickland's name, and these had to be negotiated. So it resolved itself into a case of personating Mr. Strickland or losing the major part of the capital which was so essential to a fugitive in flight.

The first thing to do was to create confidence, and this is easily done if you can afford to be a little lavish. Mr. Strickland changed one of his notes for ten sovereigns and twenty half-sovereigns, and proceeded to invest them. This took the form of tossing them about. Four half-sovereigns to as many beggars, as many to servants in the hotel for trifling services; a couple of pounds to the hotel guide, who took him the round of the shops to get a new outfit. Gold here, gold there, gold everywhere where silver in small pieces would have been ample. By night he had squandered the most of his twenty pounds in backsheesh, and provided himself with an expensive outfit, but in the hotel they were talking of him as the "Rich Englishman," and he could have got credit all over Gibraltar!

The P. and O. steamer was expected the second day after his arrival, and he went to the office and purchased a ticket—for Calcutta, the guide thought—but it was really only for Malta. The guide was a very civil and obsequious fellow, whom Mr. Strickland had christened Don Quixote. Mr. Strickland went nowhere without Don Quixote, who was an exceedingly communicative individual, and gave the widest circulation to all that Mr. Strickland told him. Thus it soon came to be generally understood that Mr. Strickland was the head of one of the richest mercantile firms in Calcutta, and something not far removed from a millionaire. In fact Don Quixote told the bank manager at Gibraltar as much when Mr. Strickland sent him to that individual to

inquire when it would be convenient for him to call and change some circular notes. Having thus paved the way, he drove to the bank and presented his notes in such a nonchalant manner that you would never have suspected he had been rehearsing the scene in the privacy of his bedroom for a couple of hours that morning. And so that little difficulty was got over.

The next day the steamer arrived, and Mr. Strickland paid his bill and drove down to the quay to embark. But when he arrived there he remembered he had left some documents in the drawer of his bedroom at the hotel, and sent Don Quixote, whom he could not get rid of, back for them, with promise of a five pound note if he brought them before the steamer sailed. The guide hurried back to the hotel, and Mr. Strickland engaged a boat and pushed off.

As it threaded its way through the crowded shipping he asked many questions about the different steamers, especially about one called the *Humber Maid*, which was flying the Blue Peter and just about to weigh anchor for Bombay, as he was told.

They were passing under its stern, when, without rhyme or reason, Mr. Strickland, who was steering, put the boat's head about, and made for the gangway. "Wait for me," he cried to the boatmen, and in another moment was on board.

A couple of sailors were engaged in putting on the hatches. "Do you carry passengers?" he asked them.

"We carry three, but we're not a passenger boat."

"Who's the person to apply to for a passage?"

"Why, the old man. That's him swearing on the bridge."

Mr. Strickland made his way to the officer indicated, politely doffed his hat, and came to the point at once.

"Can you give me a passage to Bombay?"

The sudden request startled the Captain not a little. He took a good observation of Mr. Strickland, formed an opinion about him, and answered his question by asking another.

"And who might you be?"

"I'm a traveller. I've got to get to Bombay. I was going to sail by the P. and O., but she's full up."

"Hey," said the Captain, "Full up? Well I'm full up, too."

"You've only three passengers."

"They've chartered the whole of the accommodation."

"See here, I'll give you fifty pounds for a passage."

The Captain seemed impressed. "Fifty pounds, hey? But we're just weighing anchor. I can't stop for your baggage."

"Its alongside."

"That so! Well if you've got your money as handy as your ——"

"Here's my passage money," said Mr. Strickland, pulling out a bundle of notes and tendering the amount due.

"My, my!" ejaculated the Captain in undisguised admiration, "You does do business slick. What might your name be?"

"Robert Bolt."

"Bolt—hey! You're not making a bolt of it, are you?"

"Didn't I tell you I wanted to sail by that P. and O. boat?" cried Robert indignantly. "If you're not satisfied ——"

"Say no more, say no more," broke in the Captain, "Bo'sun, sling the gentleman's traps aboard. New passenger."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And see here, Mister," went on the Captain

apologetically to Robert Bolt, "We've got the Great Panjandrum aboard, and I'd sooner you didn't go aft till we're out at sea. It'll take a bit of fixing as I'll explain by-and-by."

"Right you are," acquiesced Robert, quite ready to make himself accommodating in his satisfaction at having secured the passage.

Meanwhile Don Quixote having possessed himself of the valuable documents which the Rich Englishman had left behind him, hurried back to the mail steamer, joyfully anticipating his five pounds reward. But on getting aboard there were no signs of his amiable and generous employer. He searched the steamer high and low, and instituted a hundred enquiries, but to no purpose, and in the end he was compelled to depart, mournful and disappointed, when the steamer started.

Returning he took the liberty to examine the valuable documents he had been despatched so urgently to recover. They appeared to be singularly commonplace in their nature, being nothing more or less than receipted bills for purchases made at Gibraltar, and there dawned upon Don Quixote the idea that he had been befooled. On reaching the jetty he made enquiries from the boatmen, and discovered Mr. Strickland had boarded the outward-bound tramp steamer which had just dropped her pilot in the offing.

The guide was quite nonplussed. This Rich Englishman, who showered gold with such profusion, taking passage in a common canal tramp! What could it mean?

He could not understand, but it brought him to the conclusion that Mr. Strickland was an exceedingly mysterious gentleman, and he would remember him for many a long day by reason of that five pound note!

CHAPTER IV.

HIS EXCELLENCY FALOON.

"**A**ND now," said Captain Crake, as soon as the *Humber Maid* was set on her course, "we'll go aft and see about berthing you."

He dived into the chart room, changed his coat, spruced himself up a bit, as a man does before he enters superior company, and lead the way down the ladder of the bridge.

"They're very tip-top folk," he whispered; "Connected with Kings. Gent's a General. They call him 'His Excellency.' One's got to dip the flag to him. Remember that. He's a fair whacker if the wind don't serve—a fair whacker!"

They reached the poop, where sat a group of passengers, a gentleman and two ladies, under the lee of the deck-house. Of the three the gentleman filled the eye completely, to the exclusion of everything else, so superlative was his aspect and outline. He was rotundly stout, and emphasised his bulk by the eccentricity of his costume which, at the first glance, suggested an Oriental origin. Upon his head was a fez, and on his feet, cocked prominently upon a camp stool, a pair of red Turkish slippers, with the toes turned up like rolls of curly bacon. His gilt-buttoned coat suggested some species of military uniform; his waist was encircled by a cummerband, profusely embroidered with gold, and his white trousers were as capacious as pyjamas. He might

have been costumed for a comic opera, so bizarre was his get-up.

His facial attributes were quite in keeping with his sartorial eccentricity and presented a novelty of design. His scarlet face coincided with a pompous and choleric expression, but his little light bluey-grey eyes were reminiscent of a rather stale whiting's. His nose was of the order called bottle, and from his upper lip dangled and drooped limply down to his coat lappel, an enormous whitey-yellow moustache.

Robert Bolt had just time to take these points in superficially, when Captain Crake introduced him.

“General and ladies—may I presume? A new passenger,” he waved his hand rather disparagingly in the direction of Robert, and proceeded, “Mr. Robert Bolt—His Excellency General Ferdinando Faloon, Commander - in - Chief and Confidential Adviser to his Majesty the Rajah of Ramjugger. Mr. Robert Bolt—the Miss Faloon, sister to His Excellency the General Ferdinando Faloon. Mr. Robert Bolt—Miss Willis, niece to His Excellency the General Ferdinando Faloon.”

Robert met with a compound reception. His Excellency looked aghast, the Aunt gloomy, and the niece glad. But he had no time to diagnose the attitude of the ladies towards him because his whole attention was absorbed by the General who, rising to his feet with the laboured deliberation of a recumbent bull-buffalo, drew forth a red bandana handkerchief and proceeded to flog the air with it, like a Spanish matador.

“A new passenger! Impossible!” he exclaimed, pompously. “I cannot permit this intrusion on my privacy.” He shoo’d his bandana in the direction of Robert much as he might have done at a blue-bottle fly. “When I engaged your saloon accom-

modation, Captain Crake, it was on the distinct understanding that it was exclusively reserved for my suite."

The Captain put on a propitiatory air. "Why, so you did, your Excellency, so you did. But this here's been quite an accident. Mr. Bolt came aboard like a flying fish, just as we were tripping anchor. And he put it so sudden and so—so strong, that I couldn't refuse him a passage. The claim of humanity, Your Excellency—the claim of humanity."

The General emitted a snort. "It's a breach of contract," he declared, waving his bandana like a battle-flag, "a gross breach of contract. I shall report it to your owners, Captain Crake. I was never so humiliated and scornfully treated in a long and honourable military and political career!" And he turned majestically round and tramped to the other side of the deck, his toes very much turned out, and his demeanour that of a bearded Pasha.

Captain Crake tugged Robert by the sleeve. "You take the tiller and luff," he whispered. "I leave it to you, Mister, to get me out of this. Let the old grampus blow himself out, and then tell him your grandfather was Prime Minister of Honolulu or Foreign Secretary of the Fiji Islands. Luff and bluff and he'll haul down his bandana and be drinking four to one by sunset." And with a respectful naval salute to the ladies the Captain retired to the bridge.

Robert felt far from comfortable. His Excellency on the other side of the deck was engaged in irascible flag-flapping, and Robert did not conceive it an appropriate moment to try pacification. So he turned his attention to the ladies. The elder one was angular, prim and withered, and apparently about fifty years of age. She sat very erect on her chair, giving the impression of having swallowed a

stair rod. As she caught Robert's eye she dropped her own, pursed her lips, and concentrated her attention on some knitting she was engaged in. If anything this added to her unattractiveness.

So Robert shifted his glance to the girl. She was pretty, plump and *petite*, with a blonde pink and white complexion and lovely golden hair. Her face was frolicsome, only just at present there was a pout of disapproval on it, and Robert feared it was a protest against his intrusion. He was conscious of not cutting a very captivating figure with his arm in a sling and his head bandaged.

"I am extremely sorry—" he began with an apologetic bow to the Aunt.

"Captain Crake should have obtained His Excellency's sanction," she said, icily. "My brother chartered the saloon of this steamer. His Highness insisted on it. The etiquette of the Royal Court demands exclusiveness."

"I deeply deplore—" Robert attempted to continue, with diplomatic humility.

Again Miss Faloon cut him short. "My niece, the Ranee Rosalie, will be prejudiced by the circumstances if information of it should reach her Kingdom. The etiquette of Oriental Royalty is more exacting than that of Spain, Austria or Russia."

Robert was fogged, and ventured an interrogatory glance at Miss Willis.

"My sister is Queen of Ramjugger," she explained. "We are going out to pay her a visit. She is called the 'Ranee Rosalie.'"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Robert. "And where might 'Ramjugger' be?"

At the first sound of conversation, the General abandoned his isolation, and joined the group.

"'Ramjugger,' sir," he broke in, "is in India. It is the 'Kingdom of Repose.' 'Ram,' repose,

‘jugger,’ land of. The Royal dynasty of Ramjugger is the oldest in the world. His Highness is descended from the Sun.”

He waved his bandana familiarly, but respectfully, towards that luminary, through the awning.

“And I thought men were descended from monkeys!” protested Robert, as one receiving instruction.

“It is possible some upstarts are,” said the General, nastily. “But, in Ramjugger, they trace their pedigree back to the Sun Gods.”

He removed his fez, and began to mop the very baldest head Robert had ever seen—one which created a wonder, that a man, who could grow such a profusion of hair on his lip, should be so devoid of it on his skull. Having polished his cranium until it shone like a roc’s egg, His Excellency continued:

“Ramjugger is the centre of the extensive and glowing land of Rajputana—the Home of Chivalry and Glory! I am the Rajah’s Commander-in-Chief. Also, his Confidential Adviser. In short, I run his Kingdom for him.”

“I am honoured to meet so distinguished a personage,” said Robert, by way of observation.

“I have remodelled the Ramjugger army on modern lines,” went on the General, obviously eager to advertise himself. “Horse, Foot, and Artillery, including an Elephant Battery, a Camel Battery, a Mule Battery, and a Coolie Battery. When we fire a General Salute, the Rajah’s ancestors in the Sun can hear it. The Army I have the honour to command has never known defeat since the stormy days of Tamerlane. Its annals of Heroism, Conquest and Victory extend back to the Childhood of the World.”

“Your Excellency impresses me,” said Robert, as seriously as he could.

"My brother impresses everyone," put in Miss Faloon, tartly. "He is one of the Rulers of India."

This flattering tribute pleased the General, who ran his fingers down his moustachios. "I am the Power behind the Throne of Ramjugger," he declared, majestically, and proceeded to light a very strong, evil-looking, black cigar, whilst Robert looked at him critically, trying to gauge his man.

"The Rajah," went on His Excellency, waving his cheroot like a joss-stick, "is a Ruler of the highest Rajpoot caste. The Rajpoots regard their ladies much as we do angels. The Fair Sex have apartments to themselves. They are not supposed to mingle with males. They are treated like Goddesses. My niece—the Ranee Rosalie—is the Queen of Ramjugger, and the head of female society there. My sister and Miss Willis are going to pay her a visit. They have to conform to the customs of her Kingdom. It was by the particular command of the Rajah that I chartered the entire passenger accommodation of this steamer. His Highness insisted on the seclusion and privacy which I tried to secure for the ladies. It is a slur on the arrangements which he commanded for the journey, that their privacy has been broken into by—h'm—a stranger. His Highness will probably make it the occasion of a diplomatic representation to the Government of India. You look astounded, sir? If you knew the native attitude towards ladies of high degree, you would understand the serious nature of the obligations imposed upon me to carry out His Highness's orders in their integrity."

"In proceeding to such an exalted sphere of life," chimed in Miss Faloon, scratching her nose with a knitting-pin, "we have to respect the etiquette of the East, and conform to the customs of an ancient land, where ladies are so reverently esteemed

that it is a breach of good manners for men to look at their faces! Far more so to address them. It is something stricter than the sanctity of the Convent which surrounds my sex in the Orient."

The elderly lady delivered herself of these select sentiments with the pride of a Princess and the frigidity of a Lady Superior.

At this point, Miss Willis, who had been fidgeting about a good deal on her chair, broke into the conversation with a sudden, impetuous audacity.

"Stuff and nonsense, Auntie! I'm not going to be shut up like a nun! I wrote and told Rosie so. I'd like to see her husband shut me up! I'd box his ears for him—so there!"

"Lily!" exclaimed her aunt, amazed, and shocked beyond expression by this mutinous outburst.

"Lilian!" roared the General, flourishing his bandana, as though he would stifle her under its ample folds.

"Oh, you may say what you like; but I am sick of it all! I'm sick of the voyage, and this stuff and nonsense about being worshipped and secluded, and not allowed to speak to anybody. I mayn't speak to the ship's officers. They mayn't come to this part of the deck. I mayn't go forward! And this horrid, dull, slow old tub, that only goes about five yards an hour—good gracious me!—I shall be ripe for the grave before the voyage is over. And when we do get a passenger—!" She stopped awkwardly, as she caught Robert looking at her, in amused admiration of her revolt. Then, at a loss how to finish her sentence, she jumped up and ran into the deck-house.

"Disgraceful," ejaculated Miss Faloon, rising to follow her. "I think Lily must have taken leave of her senses."

"Scandalous!" declared the General. "Wants a whipping—a good whipping, and I hope you'll administer it, Belinda. You see, sir, what comes of your intrusion. You've raised a rebellion. Did you hear her say she would box His Highness's ears? Do you know, that would be considered Treason—High Treason—in Ramjugger?"

"Faith," laughed Robert; "if you call that High Treason, your Monarchical institutions in Ramjugger must be exceedingly dickey! I don't wonder at any young girl jibbing at the idea of being shut up like a nun."

"You don't understand the East," fumed the General; "you have no veneration for the pride and prejudices of a prehistoric people. You are a mere mushroom, sir!" And His Excellency grew purple in the face with concentrated indignation.

A retort rose to Robert's lips, but, remembering the sufferance of his position he gulped it down. "You are not very complimentary," he protested, with a light laugh as he proceeded to fill a pipe; "nor do I think you are justified in making such a remark."

"I have made a life-long study of the manners and customs of the natives of India."

"And are you going to adapt them to an English school-girl?" asked Robert, describing Lily as she appeared to him.

"She is the sister of the Ranee Rosalie who has to give the tone to the female society of Ramjugger. We have been trying to make her realise that. She has got to be subdued and sobered; to be trained to an appreciation of the exalted sphere she is going to enter. She is too giddy and frivolous; she lacks dignity and reserve. Behaviour like her's would imperil her character for respectability in an Oriental court. School girls can cause scandal, sir, can cause scandal! We were getting her under

control, and you burst in upon us and cause this rebellious commotion! Box His Highness's ears! Good heavens! It is only one step removed from beating him with a slipper!"

"Beating him with a slipper?"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you don't know that is the greatest insult you can administer to a native of India—that and knocking his turban off, which would be the result of a box on the ears. Conceive my feelings if I saw His Highness's jewelled turban struck from his royal head by my own flesh and blood! And I believe the rebellious young thing is capable of doing it! We were just reducing her to discipline, and here you come and—hang me, sir! but I'd like to pitch you overboard!"

"Confound it, what have I to do with your niece's revolt?"

"Your presence, sir, encourages her. I've had to have the mates and engineers forbidden the poop. They filled her head with the most insubordinate ideas. I—I won't have her making casual acquaintances—so there!" And the General glared at Robert as though he suspected him of the most diabolical intrigue.

"I couldn't help the Captain introducing me," said Robert.

"The Captain had no right to do it. He had no right to give you a passage. This poop deck is mine. It is *purdah*."

"What the deuce is *purdah*?"

"*Purdah* is a curtain, sir. It comprehends privacy, seclusion and immunity from male intrusion. The Mahomedans call it the *Harem*, the Hindoos the *Zenana*. It shuts out everyone but husbands, fathers, uncles, and elder brothers. Strangers shot at sight if they attempt to gain admittance. That's what 'Behind the *purdah*' means. And you've

pushed through my *purdah*, sir. It is insufferable. It destroys the discipline I have been inculcating. And that wild, giddy girl was quite handful enough before you came."

"You're incomprehensible," said Robert. "Destroy discipline! What the dickens have I got to do with the discipline of your niece?"

"You've thrust your society upon us; isn't that enough?" demanded His Excellency.

"If you call taking a passage for Bombay 'thrusting my society upon you'——?"

"What else is it? This is my poop deck, my saloon, my ship. I've paid for the whole accommodation. You've no right to be here. In India, sir, if you tried to get behind the *purdah* of any respectable native you'd be sent to prison. It is a criminal outrage. This is the *purdah* of His Highness the Rajah of Ramjugger. These ladies are his relatives. Miss Willis is his sister-in-law. A peculiar sanctity attaches to a sister-in-law in Ramjugger. By heavens, sir, your presence here is an outrage! What will the Rajah say? He will be furious. He has paid for the privacy of his *purdah* and he doesn't get it."

"You flummux me," said Robert; "What are you driving at?"

"If you've got any decency in you, you'll go forward and mess with the officers."

"I'll be hung if I do," said Robert. "I've paid fifty pounds for my passage, and I'm not going to stew in those stuffy cabins by the engines."

"I'll report the Captain to his owners," said the General, brandishing his bandana, "the rascal that he is!"

"Do as you please."

"And if I see you talking to my niece, sir, I'll—I'll—I'll lock her up in her cabin."

"I don't want to talk to your niece."

"But she'll want to talk to you. She wants to talk to everybody," spluttered His Excellency, impotently. "And I won't have her making casual acquaintances. That's why I chartered the steamer. It was His Highness's particular command. He will be shocked and scandalised. It will be a stain upon his treatment of the ladies of his family. People will say he was too mean to charter a steamer for them! For the aunt and the sister of the Queen of Ramjugger!"

"Pooh, pooh, pooh," pished Robert, preposterously, who was getting impatient of the conversation. "Enough, sir. I won't interfere with your niece. All I want is to get settled down in my cabin. You leave me alone and I'll leave you alone," he added, as he turned to enter the deck-house. Whereupon His Excellency, with a haughty snort, plumped down into his chair again, and called out to the steward to bring him his brandy and some soda water.

CHAPTER V.

LILY WILLIS.

NOTWITHSTANDING the unpropitious nature of his welcome, Robert was mightily satisfied to find himself upon the *Humber Maid*. For the first time he felt free—clear—adrift from all touch with the past. The chasm between him and that fatal encounter was complete, and he could contemplate his surroundings with calm and unsuspicuous eyes.

His Excellency and Miss Faloon ignored him, and Lily Willis did not put in an appearance again till dinner, when she was shepherded to the table, and from thence to the deck by Miss Faloon as though she had been a state prisoner. There she was allowed an hour's constitutional exercise, and then sent to her cabin. Meanwhile the General applied himself to potations of brandy and water, and to smoking many foul, black cigars, and about eight o'clock emerged on deck with unsteady steps, and stood lurching and trying to balance himself by the wheel, whilst Miss Faloon discreetly withdrew. It was clear he was a hardened toper, and Robert wondered whether it was consciousness of his own weakness that made him so angry at having his *purdah* intruded upon.

Exclusiveness on board a steamer where there are only four passengers berthed in one small deck-house, grouped in a limited poop and bound to mingle at meals four times a day, is a little difficult

to maintain. Once established on board, Robert pervaded the atmosphere much as an unwanted passenger does that of a railway compartment. His Excellency and Miss Faloon had, perforce, to make the best of his company, and the common amenities of mealtimes compelled a tardy recognition of his presence which was unavoidable. For the first two days they tried to guard Lily and isolate her, but she was too mercurial and impulsive to be kept, hour after hour, in a chair by her aunt's side. The tax was too great on the prim, elderly lady, who had come to that age when peace and quiet are appreciated. As for the General he was stout, the sea air was soporific, and he slumbered much. And he went to bed drunk every evening. The gilt faded off that bombastic fraud under the effects of more intimate acquaintance, and proved him mere gingerbread underneath. He grew loquacious in his cups and belittled himself. The third night Robert had to assist him to his cabin.

His talk was ever of Ramjugger; amusing at first, but it soon palled. Miss Faloon retained her frigid demeanour, and sought to crush Robert by frequent references to "His Excellency" and "my niece, the Ranee Rosalie." She never spoke without drawing those titled personages into her speech. She was a simple-minded woman, really, and believed all her brother told her. She was dazzled with his descriptions of the Rajah's Court, and flattered with the idea of its etiquette in relation to her sex. She had felt the pinch of poverty, and known what it was to meet with scant respect; and the prospect of living in a palace, and being treated with distinction and deference, turned her head.

As for Lily, after the humiliation of the first day had expended itself in a pretty pout, she

recovered her wonted spirits, and was soon joining in the meal-time conversation—with her eyes and smiles, if not with her voice. She lived in considerable awe of her uncle—and, indeed, was heartily frightened of him when he was “in his cups”—but, as Robert soon perceived, she had pretty well her own way with her aunt. There was a bright cheerfulness and engaging candour about Lily that did Robert good, and carried him out of his thoughts. They soon came to be good friends—in that silent way which begins many friendships. To him, she appeared only an attractive child—more by token of her childish face than her years. And, although she thought him very old—who had yet to reach thirty—she also thought him very nice, because he was so polite to her at table, and treated her like a grown-up young lady, which she aspired to be. And thus, despite the edicts of the General, and the promises of Robert to respect the *purdah*, he and Lily were soon on the high road to become friends.

It was on the third day after leaving Gibraltar that Lily broke from the fetters of restraint, and appeared on deck, one morning, before breakfast, and greeted Robert with a smiling “Good morning,” which plainly extended an invitation for the pleasure of his company. Five minutes later, you might have thought them old acquaintances, by the freedom with which they were laughing and chatting, as they paced the deck.

“ You have not told me anything about your sister, the Ranee,” said Robert, presently. He was not without curiosity on the point. “ How did she come to marry ? ”

“ My uncle invited her to keep home for him a year ago. And then the Rajah fell in love with her, and she married him.”

“ And is she happy ? ”

Lily opened her childish, blue eyes very wide.

"Of course, she is! She has everything to make her happy. The most beautiful jewels, two palaces, horses and carriages, heaps of money, and a Court of her own. What more can a girl dream of?"

"But her husband—isn't he a black man?" asked Robert, rather distastefully.

"Why, of course, he's not white. But, then, he's devoted to her. And he would be very handsome if he were not so fat. Fatter than uncle, to judge by his photograph! But, then, Rajahs are always stout, uncle says. All rich and respectable men in India have to be stout."

"Your uncle appears a very remarkable man," suggested Robert, more in reference to His Excellency's eccentricity of appearance than to any shining virtues he displayed.

"He is," acquiesced Lily. "He has done wonderful things."

"Indeed. I should like to hear about him."

"He went out to India as a schoolmaster. Whilst so employed, he joined the volunteers, and became fascinated with the military profession. Then he obtained the appointment of tutor to the Rajah of Ramjugger, who was a boy. The Rajah grew very fond of him, and it made all the other European officials jealous, and they schemed together, and uncle lost his appointment. They tried to make out that he spoiled the Rajah, who was only fifteen years old then. However, His Highness never forgot uncle; and, when he succeeded to the throne, two years ago, he sent for him, and gave him a state appointment. And now, next to the Rajah, uncle is the greatest man in Ramjugger."

"A very extraordinary career, truly. And your father?"

"My father and mother are both dead. They died when Rosie and I were children, and Aunt Belinda brought us up. We owe everything to her, for it wasn't till two years ago that uncle began to help us."

"How long has he been in England?"

"Only two months. He had to come home, to buy a lot of things for the Rajah. We have a hundred tons of cargo on board for Ramjugger. And then uncle proposed we should go out and spend the winter with Rosalie."

"I thought you said she wrote to you to come?"

"She never writes to us, because letter-writing by princes and princesses is against royal etiquette in India. Really high-born ladies are not supposed to be educated. It is considered vulgar! Isn't that a funny idea? If you are educated, you must pretend not to be!"

"And you never hear from your sister?" asked Robert, in considerable surprise.

"Oh, yes. We hear often. She has a secretary. But the letters are so funnily worded, in the most grandiloquent, courtly language. Rosie signs them with a seal. Uncle says that is the rigid rule for royal persons, and she would be demeaning herself if she wrote with her own hands, which is common people's work only. You see, she is married to a very high-caste Rajah; and, although she is a Christian, she has to act and behave as though she were of his caste, and keep up her dignity as his Queen."

"Most extraordinary," ejaculated Robert. "Quite incomprehensible to me!"

"That is what it seemed to us at first, until uncle explained it. He says Rosie leads a most delightful, luxurious life. There is no wish or whim of hers that is not fulfilled. And her jewellery!

Oh, Mr. Bolt, she has enough to *cover* her! When she has got them on, she's *all* jewels!" And Lily's eyes sparkled at the dazzling picture her imagination conjured up.

"Are you looking forward to your visit?"

"I should just think I am! I haven't been thoroughly happy since Rosie left, and I'm just dying to see her again. And I'm to have as many horses as I want, and to go riding, and hawking, and gazelle-hunting—only I don't think I should have the heart to see the dear little things hurt!—and sailing on the Rajah's private lake. And he will give me lots of jewels, because that is an Indian custom. And perhaps I shall be made Lady-Colonel of one of his cavalry regiments! Uncle is going to try. It is the greatest compliment a Rajpoot can pay a lady. In their history, they had Princesses who fought like Boadicea and Joan of Arc."

"And what about the shutting-up, and the seclusion from male society?"

"I'd like to see anyone try to seclude me!" cried Lily, shaking her golden curls, and looking as defiant as a ruffled canary. "Rosie may do as she likes—perhaps she is obliged to obey now that she is a real Queen. Of course, she has her duties and responsibilities. But I am only going out on a visit, to enjoy myself. Shut me up, indeed! They'd better try!"

She faced round at Robert, and drew her pretty *petite* figure up to its full height, and cocked her chin contumaciously. It was a delightfully round, creamy little chin, Robert thought. She was all confidence, sparkle, and gaiety, anticipating her jewels, and her cavalry regiment, and the manifold delights and pleasures that had been promised her. A very child—artless, innocent, and captivated with fairy tales, or what sounded like them.

"And your sister, Rosalie—is she as pretty as you?"

"As pretty as me!" echoed Lily, opening her blue eyes wide with surprise, not unmixed with pleasure.

"Is she like you?"

"Oh, no. She is dark, like our father was. I am my mother's daughter. You would never think Rosie and I were sisters."

"And how much older is she than you?"

"Two years. She's just twenty."

"Two from twenty leaves eighteen. I should never have guessed you were more than sixteen. You are so *petite* and gay and—giddy!" said Robert jocularly.

"Indeed! I think you're very cheeky! I'm grown up," she retorted, pretending to frown.

"Then I apologise. Only I can't imagine how you manage to retain your blythe, light spirits with such a grim old lady for an aunt always after you!"

"Oh, Auntie is not so very grim," denied Lily, smiling. "Only she has got her head turned with all this coming grandeur, and thinks it the correct thing to assume a stiff and starched manner. Uncle is a very great and celebrated man in India, you know. They fire cannons to salute him in Ramjugger. And he has guards round his house, which is a castle. Of course Auntie will be a sort of Dowager Queen. She has a purple silk dress in the heavy luggage in the hold, made especially for her to wear on State occasions. She has become quite stand-offish to strangers lately. She wanted me to be the same to you, but—"

"But?"

"Well, am I?" asked Lily archly and charmingly.

"Indeed you are not. But perhaps you should be."

"Oh, I couldn't be. Not when people are nice. It isn't my nature. And, besides, it was so awfully slow on board, not being allowed to speak to the officers. And so——" She smiled at Robert with an engaging, half-childish candour.

And he smiled, too. The smile that the bright prattle of a child brings to men's faces. "I hope it will all come true," he said, "cavalry regiment and all."

"And the jewels," she added eagerly, "don't forget the jewels."

"And the jewels," he echoed, his smile fading away. She was too childish and innocent for jewels, which are meant for women of a maturer age than Lily Willis, and of riper experience of life.

Their further conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the General who came on deck in a dramatic dishabille. He gave a quick glance at Lily. "Your aunt wants her early tea," he said, "go and take it to her cabin. You seem to have forgotten what I told you, Lilian," he added, "about ladies not being allowed on deck before eight o'clock."

Lily gave a pout of disapproval, as she disappeared through the doorway, and the General joined Robert.

"Have a cheroot?" he asked, and proffered one of his black, pungent ones which filled the air with acrid fumes. Robert declined politely, and passed to windward.

"What's my niece been saying to you?" asked the General.

"She has been telling me about her sister the Ranee."

"Ah, lucky girl, her sister. Played her cards well: Has more sense in her little finger than Lilian has in her whole head! She has got the Rajah under her thumb, and if she only had a son to succeed to

the throne she could make herself Queen Regent of the Kingdom, and rule the country like the old Dowager-Empress of China. And she will, too; she's a very ambitious, strong-minded young woman."

"Indeed. But how does she overcome the limitations of the seclusion of her sex, which you tell me is the custom out there?"

"The Anglo-Saxon character, sir, can make itself dominant amidst Hindoo surroundings under any circumstances. The disabilities of the sex do not affect the influence that can be exerted by a clever woman. On the contrary they are often convenient; they keep the woman out of action, and leave her cool and undisturbed for direction. She is like the officer in the conning-tower of a man-of-war; she doesn't fire the guns, but she directs them to be fired, and being out of the hurly-burly of the deck, she can see clearer and more calmly than the combatants."

"Are there many guns to be fired?"

"In a native court there is a constant campaign going on—a campaign of intrigue."

"Intrigue is a comprehensive word."

"And a comprehensive thing. It includes everything from scheming to secure a smile to plotting to poison a prince."

"Hardly a pleasant atmosphere for an English girl?"

"It has its compensations. Wealth, luxury, power," said the General, flourishing his cigar. "The Ranee Rosalie has more social and political power than any queen in Europe."

"You surprise me," said Robert.

"India is a land of surprises for the European, even as it is a land which the European has taken by surprise," rejoined the General, epigrammatically. "And the most surprising thing of all is the position of the Englishman in India."

"Does that include your own position?"

"It does, sir," said the General, swelling out his chest. "I may say my position is unique. No one thought when Ferdinando Faloon went out to India as a cadet twenty years ago that he would rise to be the Commander-in-Chief of the most warlike race in the East. Not to mention Confidential Adviser to the oldest and proudest dynasty in the great Aryan family."

"And how did you manage it?" asked Robert, curiously.

"I make bold to say by my merits, sir. By keeping a high ideal in front of me. By not swerving from the path of rectitude and duty. Moral influence linked to physical energy has been the secret of my success. Ramjugger quails before my eye!" He fixed Robert with a glance which was not altogether convincing, and struck an attitude appropriate for being sculptured in.

"And the Rajah?" queried Robert.

"The Rajah is educated. The Rajah knows what's what. He is an example of Western civilisation grafted on the Eastern stock—to a certain extent. The Rajah is guided by me. In short, I am the Rajah in all but the name. Ramjugger would sink to a third-class state if it wasn't for me. The Rajah knows that, and he very wisely deputes me to run his show.

"Does he take no part in the affairs of state?"

"Well, you see, he's a ladies' man. He has married my niece. She is completing his education, so to speak. She is Europeanising him, and he's got his work cut out to come into line with her ideas. She's furnishing the palace just now. I'm taking her out a hundred tons weight of furniture and fancy fixings. It's as much as he can do to attend to her wants. It's this, that and the other. You know the

way with ladies—especially strong-minded ladies who haven't been married long? The Ranee about takes up the Rajah's time. He has got none to spare for the affairs of State. I relieve him of the burden, and he's glad to be relieved." He leered round at Robert with half-closed eyes and nodded his head knowingly.

"And what about the seclusion of the ladies?"

"Ah, that's one little difficulty. My niece has no society. Of course she conforms to the customs of the country; but she finds it a bit dull. That's why I am taking out her sister and aunt, to cheer her up. Not that she wants cheering—but it's just a little dull having no one to talk to. The companionship will do her good and do them good. There's not a European in the state besides myself, and I'm busy all day long. So we just planned out this visit. What's the good of a girl being a queen if she can't do a good turn to her own relations? My niece the Ranee is going to make hay whilst the sun shines."

"And so she's having her sister out to help her?"

"That's about the size of it," said His Excellency.

CHAPTER VI.

A PLEASANT ENTR'ACTE.

WHILST Robert Bolt was enjoying the welcome mental relief afforded by this *entr'acte* in his flight, he was not heedless of the risks of the morrow. There was that fellow Sinclair, on board the *Thessaly*, who had expressed suspicion about him. He was in business at Port Said, and Robert would not care to meet him face to face, especially after the way in which he had abandoned the steamer at Algiers. If Sinclair's suspicions were aroused before, how much more so would they be now? Then, again, if Robert had been traced by the name of Barrington—and it was not impossible that, when Strickland returned to the office that night, he might have had some telegram, or letter, about his person, from the shipping agents at Liverpool—a description would probably be circulated at Port Said, and even a detective sent there to apprehend him, which he could easily do by travelling overland. Indeed, this possibility had been in his mind, when he determined to leave the *Thessaly* at Algiers. He had to protect himself against remote contingencies as well as against immediate dangers, and he decided to avoid landing at Port Said. Once past there, he might consider himself pretty well safe; but that was a place where every passenger was open to scrutiny; and, under the British Protectorate

of Egypt, there would be no difficulty about extradition.

So he made friends with the second engineer of the *Humber Maid*, and professed a great interest in machinery, by way of securing a hiding-place for himself, if the necessity arose. He spent several hours in the engine-room, where he soon became popular by the liberal way in which he paid his footing, signing no end of wine-cards for the benefit of the thirsty folk of the furnaces. Thrice, during this portion of the voyage, the steamer had to stop, in mid-ocean, to have some tinkering done; and, on each occasion, Robert "took a lesson," as he called it, in engineering.

On the third occasion, he learnt they were going to do a big patching job at Port Said, when the steamer was coaling, and he took the opportunity of saying, to the second engineer, that he would like to see how it was done.

"But, you'll be going ashore, surely," said the engineer.

"Oh, it's a beastly place, I hear. All flies, fleas, and fever. I don't care for wasting time. This sort of work interests me; there's something to learn. Now, then, men, are any of you thirsty? Could you manage half a dozen of beer?" he asked, of the stokers.

Needless to say, they were all thirsty; and he duly signed the voucher. The liquor department was the Captain's perquisite; and, as a result, there were never any questions asked, or wine-cards refused.

Robert's absences, for long periods, in the engine-room, were very distasteful to Lily, who much preferred him to be amusing her. By the end of a week, she had quite appropriated him, and showed a pretty imperiousness in calling him to

account, one day, when he had been down below for a couple of hours.

“Where have you been?” she asked him.

“Watching them tinkering up the boiler.”

“You’re very selfish. You never think of me, all alone.”

“Then, I’ll think of you now!” he answered, gently, and with intent to propitiate. “What shall we have a game of? Draughts—bezique—shuffle-board—ship’s quoits——”

“Oh, I’m sick of all the games,” she broke in, impatiently. “I wanted you to talk to me; but, I believe, you love your dear engineers better than you do me!”

“My little girl,” he said, coaxingly; “you’re very cross to-day. What has put you out?”

“Aren’t you enough to make me cross?” she pouted. “How would you like it, if I went away, and left you all alone?”

“I shouldn’t like it at all; but I shouldn’t get cross with you.”

“That shows you don’t like me, or you couldn’t help getting cross,” she answered, naïvely. “Oh, this horrid, dull, slow voyage. I do wish I were with Rosy!”

“You will be soon. And I hope very happy.”

She sighed, and then glanced up at him with her pretty girlish eyes, that were as blue as a forget-me-not.

“I wonder if I shall ever see you again?” she asked.

“Never,” he said, shaking his head.

She turned her face away quickly; and, after a little pause,

“I wish I had never met you,” she announced.

“And I am very glad that I met you!”

“I don’t believe you, or you wouldn’t——”

She never finished her sentence, but suddenly turned and retreated to her cabin, and shut herself up for a couple of hours.

"Poor little thing!" he murmured to himself, after she had gone. "She's moped to death. And no wonder. It isn't fair on her—this joyless voyage. I wish we had a dozen other passengers."

He flung himself into a chair, and tried to interest himself in a book. The General was snoring on one of the settees in the saloon, where he always stretched himself out between luncheon and tea. It was his after-tiffin siesta, as he called it. Miss Faloon was alternately dosing and knitting; she, too, suffered from an irresistible inclination to slumber during the warm afternoons. The Captain never came aft; the officers were forbidden the quarter-deck, out of respect for the exclusiveness His Excellency insisted upon. What was there for Lily to do? She was in the butterfly stage of existence, and these sedate and somnolent surroundings were depressing to her. Sometimes, Robert wished he were a boy of eighteen, irresponsible, and full of spirits in harmony with hers, in order that he might meet Lily in her own vein, and have a good, innocent romp. There is no harm in boy-and-girl flirtations; but, between him and her—. He grew thoughtful, for he could not disguise from himself that she sought his company, and was always wanting him to be with her. Circumstances were throwing them together, and circumstances are sometimes too strong for us in this life.

A couple of hours later Lily came stealing out of her cabin to where he was sitting, and whispered,

"I didn't mean to punish you."

"Punish me?" he queried.

"Yes. I kept away two hours;" she pronounced the period as though it had been two years.

"It was to—punish you. And—I've punished myself!"

She spoke so sincerely, yet so unsophistically that he did not know what answer to make. He affected to laugh it off.

"I feel dreadfully punished," he declared. "And I'm quite good now! Suppose, for a change, I read to you?"

"Don't you want to talk?"

"I want to amuse you."

"Then talk. I love talking. You know you said I was a chatter-box! I can read to myself when you are away."

"Very well; we'll talk about Ramjugger, and your cavalry regiment. What is the colour of the uniform—do you know?"

"Mr. Bolt," she said, with a sudden gleam of brightness, "couldn't you come and see?"

He shook his head, implying it was out of the question.

"Oh, Mr. Bolt, do, do try and come and see us at Ramjugger. I do so want you to come!"

"My little girl," he said, quietly and firmly, "you are asking an impossibility."

"But you will be in India. You might come?"

"I'm going to leave India."

"Going to leave it! Where are you going?"

"I haven't made up my mind. To the Seychelles, perhaps."

"What are the Seychelles?"

"They are a group of islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean, hundreds of miles from land."

"Oh, how delightful! Are they desert islands?"

"No, they're inhabited," he answered, laughing at her naïveté, "but there are not many inhabitants. And they are very beautiful, and the only place in the world where the coco-de-mer grows."

"Are they tropic islands?"

"Yes. Right under the equator. And the climate is lovely."

"Oh, how I should like to go to the Seychelles," she sighed ingenuously, and looked at him with a wistful expression. "I wish uncle were going to the Seychelles instead of to that horrid Ramjugger! Won't you come to Ramjugger?" she asked again, coaxingly, "just for a few days?"

And so the talk went on. In a week this child, so innocent withal, had fallen head over heels in love with the single man she was brought into contact with. Nor is that so outrageous as it sounds, for board a ship is a fatal place for the affections, and ship life is a premium on flirting. Not that Lily was flirting; she was far too much in earnest for that; nor had Robert set himself to flirt with her. But she had no other society than his, and without intending any harm he had made himself agreeable to her, never anticipating what the result would be. And now, much to his distress, he realised what had happened, and, if he could have had his own way, would have left the steamer there and then. But, alas, that was out of the question, nor could he leave it at Port Said, where he dared not go ashore. Too late in the day he discovered that the mischief was done, and that this girl felt for him an affection that could only end in unhappiness. It distressed him beyond words, for Lily had shone on his life like a passing sunbeam. And even passing sunbeams are passing pleasant when the clouds have been dark and gloomy, and life seems drear and hopeless, as Robert's had before he boarded the *Humber Maid*. They brighten for a moment—a precious moment when it is snatched from care and anxiety.

"I must put an end to this," he said to himself, decisively. And wondered how he could do so

without appearing cruel or unfeeling. For Lily's very innocence protected her from the course he would have adopted with a girl more conversant with the ways of the world. But then, again, such a girl would not have surrendered herself, as Lily had done, with the heart-whole abandon of first-love, and the emotional impulse of inexperience.

It may seem strange that His Excellency and Miss Faloon had nothing to say to this growing intimacy. The fact was that, with all her innocence, Lily was not without the cunning of love! At the beginning of the voyage, the General had been so strict with her, and put such a summary termination to her intercourse with the ship's officers, that she determined not to give him the opportunity of exerting a similar authority over her relations with Robert. When her uncle's or aunt's eyes were fixed on her, Lily was marvellously discreet, and so diplomatic, in the privacy of the cabin which she shared with her aunt, that she quite hoodwinked that lady, and dispersed any suspicion she might have entertained by pretending to mimic Robert, and make fun of him. And then lay awake at night, upbraiding herself for such wicked deceit, more for her attitude towards Robert than her conduct towards her aunt, and her heart very sorrowful because he had "been down in that beastly engine-room again." It was, indeed, the only way Robert had of evading Lily's company, which he saw it was more and more necessary to do day by day.

With His Excellency, other considerations operated, to deter him from pursuing that high-handed behaviour towards Robert which had distinguished his conduct on the first day. The General had allowed his tongue to be loosened on more than one occasion, by the contents of the glass of which he was too fond. Carried away by the propensity

to talk arising from being over-elated, he had launched out into personal reminiscences which failed to create the impression he intended, and made him sorry, later, for having indulged in them. He was neither a clean talker nor a clean liver, and some of his experiences, retailed in the confidence of his cups, had disgusted Robert. There were some very shady stories of how he had benefited, at the Rajah's expense, in the matter of State contracts, which seemed indistinguishable from swindling; and once a hint at a harem, wherein His Excellency was the Turk. Robert's reception of these confidences was chilling, and on the latter occasion he shut the General up, much as he might have done an objectionable young cad, and, rising from the table, left him spluttering with amazement and mortification at the mistake he had made in the character of his listener. And the next morning Robert took the old reprobate to task in no measured terms, and gave him what was to all intents and purposes a sound lecture! Thereafter there was a coolness between them, which left the General impotent to use the arguments of chivalry and exclusiveness for ladies, such as he had at first employed, and unable to interfere between Robert and Lily when he recalled how the former had told him he was not fit to have charge of his niece. As for Miss Faloon she was merely the instrument for conveying her brother's orders, and though she prated of exclusiveness and the royal etiquette of Oriental courts, she was not equipped to reduce her ethics to practice save under her brother's directions. And since he now had no objections to urge against Lily speaking to Robert, Miss Faloon fell back on the ways of English society, which permits men and young maidens to amuse one another—especially on board a ship and in the publicity of deck-life.

And so it came to pass that during that fateful fortnight for Lily, during which the *Humber Maid* was ploughing her slow way between Gibraltar and Port Said, she had plenty of opportunities, and was unable to avoid them, of falling as desperately in love with Robert as ever did any young girl of eighteen with a man ten years older than herself. And Robert, with the memory of his past behind him, and his heart unreceptive, saw it and was grieved and ashamed, notwithstanding it was none of his seeking. And here was a pretty state of affairs!

And so we come to the morning when the land of Egypt was in sight, and the breakwater of Port Said shot out from the low, sandy shore into the blue sea. Port Said, glittering in the sun, buzzing with flies, swarming with humanity—dark-skinned and dark-souled men, and the latter the worse of the two, at least in their inner lives. For here are gathered together the scum of Europe and the vilest dregs of the Levant.

Lily was in the greatest excitement at the prospect of a run ashore. It was her first peep of foreign lands, where men wore turbans and went about bare-footed ; where camels were natural beasts of burden, and the bazaars contained representatives of more nationalities than a fair of all the nations. The land of the Pharaohs and Old Testament history, where the women were veiled and taciturn Arabs stalked along. And there were negroes and palm-trees and fresh dates, and all the things she had read about in the books of Moses ! “ Fancy being in the land of Egypt ! ” she kept on exclaiming to herself. The mysticism of the Orient was appealing to her, as it must to every English eye that sees it for the first time.

Of course, she took it for granted that Robert would go ashore with her, and built a day of delight

on the anticipation. They had walked and talked together on deck for the last fortnight, and it was a natural corollary that they should walk and talk together on shore. It appeared to her such a matter of course, that the idea of a formal arrangement never entered into her head. His Excellency and her Aunt were to be "lost" she had decided, and she and Mr. Bolt to have "Oh, such a long day together!" She had been dreaming about it in her joyful excitement.

Robert was conscious of all this, but to go ashore at Port Said was more than he dared risk. And yet he had not the heart to disillusion Lily, nor could he do so without making some excuse, which he had not ready. He hoped that in the excitement of the trip his absence would be but a passing disappointment or annoyance, and he tried to discount that by affecting to have a bad headache on the morning of their arrival.

All were gathered together on the starboard side of the quarter deck, watching the shore unfold itself, and speculating as to what this point was, what that. His Excellency, with the blasé superiority of an old traveller, strolled backwards and forwards puffing away at one of his rank cheroots. He was costumed for the occasion; the fez had given way to a military helmet, the negligé khaki undress coat and loose trousers to a uniform gorgeous with gold braid, and his Turkish slippers were replaced by a pair of monstrous jack boots with decorative spurs of a mediæval pattern. There was a barbaric splendour about him that savoured of the scarlet and yellow East. Miss Faloon likewise displayed some pomps and vanities, being garbed in a silk dress as most appropriate for the jocund adventure, and armed with a sunshade such as Egypt had never seen before. Her pride in herself and her brother raised her to a very high pedestal of distinction.

Just as the steamer was entering the harbour the steward approached and, touching his hat, "One moment, gentlemen," he said to the General and Robert, and they stepped aside to see what he wanted.

"We always settle up for wine bills before going into port," he explained. "It's a custom at sea, and the old man's very particular about it." With which he handed each of them a bundle of their wine vouchers. Then, drawing a single card from his pocket, asked :

"Which of you gentlemen signed this card?"

His Excellency, who was nearest, took it, and read out :

"*Six bottles beer; R. Fawcitt.*"

Robert gave a jump as it flashed across him that in an absent-minded moment he had signed his real name to one of the cards he had filled in for the engine-room hands.

"'R. Fawcitt'—that's not mine," declared the General. "It's your writing, Mr. Bolt, I am sure."

They were standing by the taffrail. Robert stretched two careless fingers forward for the card, and in affecting to examine it, allowed it to drop overboard.

"Here, I say, sir!" protested the steward.

"Pooh," ejaculated Robert. "Six bottles of beer did you say? Here you are," and he paid their value in cash.

He hoped devoutly His Excellency had not been impressed by the incident. As a fact he had not been until Robert impressed it on him by the inconceivably foolish way in which he had tried to wriggle out of the dilemma.

"What was the name?" asked the General.

"Fawcitt, sir. F-a-w-c-i-t-t," answered the steward spelling it, "'R. Fawcitt.'"

"Who's Fawcitt?" asked the General of Robert.

"One of the stokers in the engine-room," said Robert, mendaciously. "I stood them some beer."

"There's no one named Fawcitt in the crew," said the steward.

"What's the total of my bill?" asked Robert, anxious to turn the conversation, and pulling out his purse.

The account was soon settled, and two minutes later Robert mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERIL OF THE SEA.

THE day that Lily fondly dreamt was going to be the happiest in her life, proved the most miserable! When Robert disappeared she was, of course, the first to note it, but imagined he had retired to his cabin to dress for going ashore. She waited impatiently for him to join them, angry at first at his unpunctuality. The steamer was moored, pratique granted, the shore-boats came alongside, her Uncle and Aunt were about to start, but no Robert! In her desperation she went to his cabin, tapped at the door and called him by name. No answer. Then with the audacity of desperation she opened the door and peeped in. The cabin was empty. Something impelled her to enter, for she wanted a moment to compose herself; so she slipped in and stood in front of his mirror, gazing blankly at her own face from which every suspicion of a smile had departed.

At which moment she heard the voice of her Aunt, grim and scandalised—"What are you doing, Lily?"

"Looking for Mr. Bolt, Auntie."

"In his cabin! I'm shocked at you. If I told your Uncle he would insist upon your being punished by being left on board. What has possessed you, Lily?"

"It's Mr. Bolt's fault. I did not want him to keep us waiting!"

"Keep us waiting, indeed! Do you think His Excellency would wait for Mr. Bolt? Don't talk nonsense, Lily. Come at once."

And Lily had to follow, feeling far more inclined to cry than rejoice at having to start without Robert. But she buoyed herself up with the hope that he would join them in the town.

It was an oppressive day. The Spirit of the East appealed to His Excellency's Oriental instincts, and he was pompous and inflated. He had waxed his sweeping moustache until the ends stood out like the arms of a semaphore. He was very hot, and it was difficult to say whether his helmet or his jack-boots incommoded him most; but he accepted the martyrdom they entailed with a stern air of duty, relieved by some curses under his breath.

"Ah," he exclaimed, as they stepped ashore, "if this had been Ramjugger I should have had an escort of cavalry ready to attend me, and been driven in a carriage and six, surrounded by my body-guard."

His behaviour was eccentric as he pursued his path with a royal ease and deliberation. A crowd of beggars followed him wherever he went, and he threw coppers to them to be scrambled for. "It was a habit natural to his exalted rank," he explained, "only in Ramjugger of course he distributed silver."

Anon he would stop at a shop in the bazaar and make a purchase. On these occasions he introduced himself by presenting a card engraved with his name and titles. "I am His Excellency General Ferdinando Faloon," he explained, "Commander-in-Chief to His Highness the Rajah of Ramjugger." No one knew who the Rajah of Ramjugger might be, but his importance was calculated by the

magnificence of the General's uniform, and his jack-boots alone were a guarantee of greatness. Moreover stoutness commands respect in the East, and the superficial area of His Excellency was enough to set all the bazaar shopkeepers grovelling.

"His Highness commanded me to bring him some Egyptian trinkets. Show me the best and choicest you have," he would command with a lofty air. But nothing was good enough for him. With a cold sneer he waved the proffered goods aside and walked out. His superior contempt obtained for him a tribute of profound respect very cheaply, and his lofty indifference to supplication created the impression that he was no common mortal. As he strolled majestically along, dismissing the shopkeepers who followed him with an insolent wave of his fat hand, he was really enjoying himself to the extent of his capacity, which found the acme of delight in posing as a personage of importance amongst obsequious black people.

Miss Faloon enjoyed herself, but in a different manner. She was frugal-minded and economical by nature, and nothing gave her greater pleasure than to finnick and haggle for trifling purchases. Port Said is an emporium for the rubbish of Birmingham, and she acquired a small collection of sham trinkets for several times their value, and was at the same time gratified by the reflection she had obtained them at a third of the price originally demanded. But the bargaining and chattering made her head ache. Whereupon His Excellency declared it was a touch of the sun, and insisted on her buying a pith, mushroom-shaped hat with a mauve gauze veil, such as she would have to wear in India. When, after many tryings on, she had suited herself, she gave the impression of being a spinster who was armour-

plated aloft, and even made Lily smile by the fierce incongruity of her aspect.

Through such scenes and experiences as these Lily had to accompany her Uncle and Aunt, with her heart heavy and sad. The day had no novelty or delight for her without Robert, and she was cross and dejected. With a sullen half-expectancy she kept a look-out for him only to keep alive her sense of disappointment, whilst she fruitlessly schemed in her mind what reproof she would administer without having the satisfaction of expressing it.

They returned to the steamer shortly after lunch, driven to its shelter by a headache Miss Faloon had contracted, and by His Excellency's craving for an afternoon siesta, for which he had specially qualified himself by imprudent potations. Lily's first question to the steward was about Mr. Bolt—where was he?

"Gone ashore, Miss, I expect," came the answer.

Gone ashore without her! It brought Lily's anger to boiling pitch. For the next hour she stood sentinel near the gangway, waiting for Robert's return, scanning eagerly every boat that put out from the shore, working herself into a bitter resentment, and rehearsing suitable speeches with which to crush him. But still no Robert, and at five o'clock the syren sounded, the moorings were cast off, and the *Humber Maid* started for the Canal.

Lily, who had been half frantic with indignation, now began to feel alarmed. Robert was not on board; had he left for good? Left without a word of farewell to her? What did it mean?

Tea was served. Miss Faloon was confined to her cabin, and His Excellency's siesta was prolonged owing to his having imbibed further refreshment. Lily sat down to the meal in solitary state. She was thankful to be alone, for the poignancy of her

feelings was such that she felt the slightest jar would make her burst out crying. She sipped a cup of tea and went on deck again to find a quiet corner. Then she sat down and watched the dull banks glide by with listless eyes, mourning for the departed Robert and wishing she were a flamingo, of which there were plenty to be seen on the bitter lake by the side of the canal.

Half-an-hour passed, and then, suddenly, a grimy figure came stealing aft.

She sprang to her feet. "Where have you been all day?" she demanded imperiously.

"Seeing the boiler tinkered up," he answered. "They've got it done at last. Made a splendid job of it."

At this announcement there arose in Lily's breast the spirit of a woman scorned. She looked at Robert with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Then I'll never speak to you again," she burst out, passionately. "I hate you, oh, how I hate you—you—you—you rude, dirty, contemptible, stoking thing!"

Choking with pent-up indignation she withered him with a look of scorn, and dashed into the deck house, leaving him with the feeling that he had deserved every word of her tirade from her point of view.

"By Jove, I'm sorry," he murmured to himself, and there came a sad look into his coal-grimed face. "Poor little thing, she must have thought me an awful brute. But it was necessary, and lucky that I did so. And this will be a good excuse to—"

He broke off, and grew grave as he thought of the danger he had escaped. For there had been danger, which, coming on the top of the incident of the wine card, had given him an extremely nasty turn.

What had happened was this. When Robert disappeared from the deck of the *Humber Maid* just as she was entering Port Said, it had been to seek the seclusion of the engine-room. His mind was full of the idiotic forgetfulness of having signed the wine-card in his proper name, and he was haunted with fears that there might be placards posted at Port Said, giving a description of him as Robert Fawcitt. Although he had discarded his bandage and sling for some days, his wearing them was in the memory of all on board. To his anxious and suspicious imagination it seemed quite possible that the British Consul and Police might have been notified of the crime and on the look out for him, and that a detective might be boarding the various steamers that arrived from the Mediterranean ports, and making enquiries about their passengers.

And then, all of a sudden, he heard a voice he recognised, and it sent a cold shiver down his back—for it was the voice of Mr. Sinclair. He was standing by the hatchway, calling down, and the next moment began to descend the engine-room stairs. In a second Robert tore off his coat and waistcoat, seized a shovel and dived into one of the bunkers. There he set to work with an energy quite foreign to the British stoker, and in a couple of minutes was as black as a sweep.

Mr. Sinclair belonged to the firm of contractors who were coaling the *Humber Maid*. He was arranging for the working of his gangs and how to apportion them. He peeped into the bunkers to estimate their position and capacity, and had a good stare at Robert, wondering at the unwonted spectacle of such devotion to duty in port. But he passed no remark and returned to the deck a few minutes later.

But Robert had received such a shock that he kept in hiding all the day, not daring to put his nose

out for fear the man should be about. Later on another difficulty arose when he aroused the curiosity of the second engineer by his incomprehensible conduct. A passenger who could pass the day they were in port in the engine-room, and about the coal bunkers, when he might be enjoying a run ashore, might well be asked what principle in life was governing his eccentric actions. Robert had to invent a reply to that poser, and it exercised his ingenuity.

And now the steamer was in the Canal and the danger over. Lucky for him that he had hidden himself. If Sinclair had seen him, well—for one thing (thought Robert, with a queer smile at the coincidence)—he had not paid his wine-bill on board the *Thessaly*.

That evening Lily did not appear at dinner. She, too, had a headache. Robert and his Excellency dined *vis-a-vis*. The General was vinous and loquacious. He indulged in Ramjuggerisms, and wanted to know where Robert had been. Why hadn't he gone ashore? There were some places of entertainment at Port Said which would have opened his eyes, said the General, with an obscene wink. He himself had been pestered with his women folk. Women were a nuisance when a man wanted to enjoy himself. They knew what to do with women in Ramjugger; kept them in their proper places under lock and key. They weren't allowed to interfere with the pleasures of men. He winked at Robert again, and nodded his head with an intoxicated leer. It was fine discipline for an English girl to marry a native husband; did 'em a lot of good, and showed 'em what their proper sphere was in life! It would do Lily a lot of good to have a husband like her sister had; she wanted being kept in order; she had been sulky all day, and had to be bothered after.

"I don't think you'll get her to fall in with your ideas," said Robert.

"Shan't I?" answered the General. "By gum, we'll see about that. I'm not paying her passage for nothing!"

"What do you mean?" asked Robert quickly, with an uncomfortable suspicion dawning upon his mind.

But the General was not to be drawn into further explanation. He relapsed into a sour silence as one who has said too much.

Robert left the table, and going on deck lit his pipe and began to walk up and down. He felt moody and dissatisfied, without precisely knowing why. He gave himself up to thinking out his present situation, and trying to discover what was his duty to Lily. Somehow, in that moment of passion, she had gained a new attraction in his eyes. The art of the coquette, which fascinates when it appears to be repelling, was unconsciously employed by Lily, and not until she had blazed up and told Robert she would never speak to him again did he realise how much he really enjoyed her society, and his inclination now was to pacify her and be good friends again.

But then he asked himself, "To what end?" And his soul told him it could only be a selfish end. A bid for a little passing enjoyment and pleasure during the few remaining days of the voyage, at the end of which she and he must part for ever. The memory of Edith rose before him; Edith of whom he dared not, must not think. To trifle with Lily's innocent and confiding affection was as cruel as it was wicked and cowardly. He was on board this ship under false pretences, and in a precarious flight. When once the voyage was over he would never see Lily again. During the last fortnight he had been surprised into an intimacy with her which

arose out of the peculiar circumstances under which they had been thrown together. That Lily had fallen in love with him, or something very like it, he could not disguise from himself. He was not a vain man; he did not ascribe the “conquest” to any personal attractions on his part. It was the result of an impressionable nature acted on by circumstances; it arose from a state of affairs which he would be a villain if he took advantage of. The opportunity now came of terminating the relations between them, and the most honest and kindest course he could pursue would be to do so, even at the cost of paining Lily, as he knew he would by taking her at her word. And he came to the decision to do so, though not without regret.

Having thus made up his mind he kept to it. Not a word did he address to Lily; he ignored her at meals; he rejected her timid advances; he evaded her whenever she approached him; and he spent his days for'ard with the officers off duty.

Like the flower she was named after, Lily withered and drooped. Had Robert but permitted her one little opening, she would have flung herself on her knees and implored his forgiveness. But he was implacable, inexorable, unapproachable. He played his accepted part firmly and sternly, notwithstanding that often, as he recalled her sad, fading face—from which the smiles had left with its colour—his heart smote him for having allowed matters to drift to such a pitch that he had to be cruel to be kind.

Five days later, they were nearing Perim. The heat through the Red Sea had been intense, and all slept on deck—the gentlemen on one side of the deck-house and the ladies on the other, where they were protected by a canvas-screen. But Lily could not sleep. Her heart was aching too much, and

sorrow kept her restless. She lay awake all night, and every night, listening to her uncle snoring, glancing at her aunt's recumbent figure by her side, and thinking of Robert. Sometimes she would hear him rise, and pace backwards and forwards, just the other side of the screen; and she longed to creep out and speak to him. A thousand times she blamed herself for letting her evil temper get the better of her. How could she have spoken to him in that shocking way? How could she dare to hope that he would ever forgive her? It was a just punishment to her, and there was no one to blame except her wicked self.

There came a night which seemed hotter and more oppressive than any previous one. Black clouds loomed in the distant sky, and sheet-lightning lit up the heavens. The Captain was of opinion that they would have a tropical storm later on. Still, as the screen had been erected for the ladies, and the heat of the cabins was enough to stifle them, he thought they might with safety sleep on deck until the storm burst. And so all turned in on their mattresses.

Lily's heart was beating fast. She was looking so ill and miserable that, despite his resolution, Robert's face had expressed the concern and pity he could not conceal. The precious days were slipping past. They would soon be at Bombay now. If he would only forgive her—would only be kind to her for the last few days—she would ask for nothing more.

At midnight, she heard footsteps at the other side of the screen. Her uncle was snoring, her aunt fast asleep. The after-part of the ship was absolutely deserted at night, for no one was allowed to disturb the sleepers there, and the watch was kept for'ard of the bridge. She recognised the footsteps; they were Robert's—just on the other side of the screen!

An audacity stormed her. She rose, wrapped her dressing-gown around her, pushed her pretty golden hair back off her face, gave one cautious look at Miss Faloon, and the next moment was by his side.

"Lily!" he exclaimed, as her hand fell timidly on his arm.

"Oh, Mr. Bolt, I couldn't help it! Please, please forgive me," she whispered, clutching him by his arms in the dark, and bursting out sobbing, silently.

"My child," he said, gravely, "you ought not to have come here. Run back, dear, run back. Go to sleep, and forget me."

"Sleep!" she echoed, wearily. "I cannot sleep. Not until you forgive me. Oh, Mr. Bolt, I am so sorry and ashamed of myself. It was my wicked, ungovernable temper. I didn't mean it. I am so miserable."

In her abandon of distress she nestled close to him, her golden hair streaming down her shoulders, her childish face peering up into his with pathetic pleading in her eyes.

The clinging touch of her, the total surrender, the imploring appeal, thrilled him. He bent his face swiftly down and kissed her between her eyes. The next moment he repented and attempted to put her away; but she resisted, encircled his neck with her arms and clung to him.

"Not until you have forgiven me."

"I have nothing to forgive, Lily."

"Promise—promise you will be the same to me as you were before," she cried. "If you won't, I'll throw myself overboard!"

"Hush, hush," he said. "You'll wake your aunt. It is you who must forgive me, that have been such a brute to you—"

“You forgive me!” she cried. “Oh——” and sank into his arms, and buried her face in his breast with a thrill of thankfulness.

“*Ship ahoy !*”

The hail came from the fo’c’s’le head.

“*Starboard the helm ! Full speed astern !*”

In an instant, the *Humber Maid* seemed alive with noise and energy ; the engine-room bell rang continuously.

“*She’s into us ! The boats ! The boats !*”

There came a crash. The *Humber Maid* rolled over on to her side, like a huge fish about to die, and there was a sound of inrushing water, an amazing vent of steam, and an appalling cry of,

“*Look out ! Her boilers will burst !*”

And Robert was thankful that he held Lily in his arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

DARK WATERS.

THE heeling of the *Humber Maid* had listed her to an angle of forty-five degrees, and sent Robert and Lily slithering into the starboard scuppers. Therein, too, on the inner side of the screen, was Miss Faloon shot, terrified and screaming ; and from the further side of the deck-house came the smothered voice of the General demanding, "What the devil —"

All this happened in half-a-dozen seconds. Realising what had occurred, Robert stumbled to his feet, snatched up Lily, and carried her to her aunt, whom he assisted to rise.

"What is the matter ?" gasped Miss Faloon, hysterically.

"Collision. Stay here. I will bring life-belts. Don't move," commanded Robert, peremptorily.

The elder lady made a clutch at him.

"Don't leave us," she implored.

But Robert broke free. Clambering up the sloping deck, towards the stern netting, where he knew a couple of life-belts were fixed, he began to grope for them. In doing so, he came across the General, who had anticipated him, and was fumbling at the fastenings with clumsy fingers.

Robert knew the trick of releasing them, and had one free in a trice. The General snatched it from his hand.

"Thank you," he spluttered. "You take the other. I'm off."

"The ladies," cried Robert, to direct him. "By the door."

"No time. Not dressed. We're sinking. Every man for himself," cried the General, turning to fly.

With one bound Robert overtook him, and, clutching his fist, delivered one well-aimed blow behind the ear, which felled his Excellency like an ox. Seizing the life-belt, he returned for the other, and then carried both to the ladies, and adjusted them.

By this time the steamer that had run into them had backed off, and the *Humber Maid* gradually came to the level. Steam was being discharged, and the syrens of both boats hooted frantically.

All was direst confusion and shouting for'ard, amidst which the passengers aft seemed forgotten, for no one came to their help.

Suddenly an explosion almost shattered the drums of their ears, followed by the most appalling shrieks and groans. The poop-deck heaved up, as though the *Humber Maid* were going to take a head-first plunge to the bottom. Robert leaned over the taffrail, trying to peer forward through the enveloping steam. As he did so, he caught sight of a small boat floating past—one that was being launched at the moment of the explosion. It was empty and adrift.

It was no time for delay. In a second, his mind was made up.

"Lily," he cried, catching her up in his arms. "Can you swim?"

"Yes—but Auntie——"

"Swim for that boat. God save you, dear."

He lifted her, and the action brought her face into contact with his. It was a momentary touch,

but he felt her lips kiss him. The next moment, he had tossed her into the sea, clear of the steamer.

Then he turned to Miss Faloon.

"You must follow. It is life or death."

"Oh, I'm terrified," she cried. "I can't! I can't! I would sooner die!"

Without another word, he seized her, ignoring her shrieks and struggles.

"Don't be a fool," he said, with a pretence of being rough. "Keep quiet!"

And he nearly squeezed the breath out of her. Then he mounted the rails, carrying her under his left arm, peered for the boat, and jumped.

The poor creature he was trying to save was worse than ever in the water. She twined her arms round his neck, after the insensate manner of drowning folk, and throttled him. He kept his presence of mind, and deliberately pressed her head under the surface until she loosed her hold. Then, he struck out from her a yard or two, and began to tread water, but keeping close enough to assist her the instant she ceased struggling. The life-belt kept her afloat, so that she was in no danger of sinking; although, in her panic and terror, she imagined the end had come.

He trod water, elevated himself, and looked in the direction where he had last seen the boat, calling out to Lily at the top of his voice. She heard him and called back that she was safe in the boat and would come to him. Then he turned to Miss Faloon again; and, approaching her from behind, he caught her by the hair. Her strength had failed, and she was feebly flapping the water with her hands. He kept her at arm's length, head up and able to breathe.

Again he trod water, recovered his breath a little and tried to locate himself. There was a

strong tide running, and he had drifted some considerable distance from the *Humber Maid*. A flare went up from the steamer that had collided with them, and threw a faint glimmer over the sea, for the night was very dark. Once more he lifted up his voice and called to Lily; and, to his intense relief, he heard her reply. Her voice guided him, and he began swimming in the direction from whence it sounded. Lily had got the oars out and was tugging as hard as her puny strength would admit. She could make no way against the current, but she managed to keep the boat stationary, and her cries of "Robert! Robert!" directed him, gave him courage, stimulated endeavour, and brought hope.

He seemed to pass through a century of struggling nights and overwhelming waters. As he fell into the trough of the sea, it was like the solitude of death surrounding him; when he lifted to the crest of the waves, it was only to behold the black waste around. But Lily's voice guided him, without his being able to see the boat; and, after some minutes' superhuman exertion, he suddenly caught a glimpse of it, and with two or three strong strokes managed to reach it and clutch the gunwale. Then, with Lily's assistance, he clambered up over the stern, and, between them, they somehow dragged Miss Faloon's inanimate body after him. Dog-tired, dead-beat, but his task accomplished, and the two women safe in the boat. With a gasp he sank into the sheets and lay there motionless.

A few minutes' rest revived him and he turned his attention to Lily and her aunt. The latter lay insensible in the bottom of the boat, and Lily was calling to her, in terms of mingled terror and endearment, but without response. Robert removed the life-belt, which still encircled the old lady's body, and adjusted her position to the best of his ability,

and helped Lily to wring the superabundant moisture out of her clothes. But, even as he was doing so—as if the elements had not taxed him sufficiently—there came a flash of lightning, followed instantly by a peal of thunder, and a tropical storm burst in all its fury on that helpless boat. It was the storm which had been predicted ; one of those tempestuous squalls which make the Red Sea so dangerous during the short time they lash its narrow waters into fury—luckily without raising great waves.

There were only two oars in the boat, which was a small one, used in the Canal for mooring and unmooring the steamer, and the easiest lowered from the davits. It contained no sails, no gear, no provisions of any sort. Robert tried to ship the rudder, but a wave carried it away from his unskilled hand. The boat fell beam on to the sea, rolling perilously. Stumbling over the recumbent form of Miss Faloon, he pushed past Lily to a seat, and, seizing an oar, pulled the boat's head round, and got her before the gale. All this time, Lily was attending to her aunt, and trying to shrink from Robert's observation as the successive flashes of lightning lit up the scene.

"How is she?" asked Robert, as soon as they were out of immediate danger of capsizing. "And how are you, Lily?"

"I think she is coming round, Mr. Bolt. She has moved twice," she answered.

"And you?" he asked. "How are you, dear?"

"Oh, don't think of me! I'm young and strong. But, poor aunt—"

She came to a stop, with a choke in her voice, but the determination not to break down.

"You're the bravest girl I ever saw in my life!" he exclaimed, in frank admiration of her pluck.

"Oh, no, no," she protested. "I'm dreadfully frightened. Don't call me brave."

"But I do," he said, emphatically. "I do. You're a girl in a thousand. Your aunt and I would have been drowned, but for you keeping your head, and directing me with your shouts."

The squall was increasing. The wind howled ; and, when the cockle-shell of a boat crested the waves, it seemed as though it would be flicked round by the force of the tempest—and that meant destruction. Robert had but a rudimentary knowledge of managing a boat, but he realised the danger of allowing it to fall beam-on, by a sort of instinct. He knew he must keep it end-on, before the gale, and to do this he tugged at the oars harder than any galley-slave under the lash. The spray, carried by the furious wind, swept over the frail craft, and, dashing in his face, stung him like the thong of a whip. The waves broke over, and played with the tiny thing as if it were a walnut-shell. It pitched and tossed to such an alarming degree that he was nearly hurled out of his seat. Lily, to save herself from being dashed to and fro, had lain down by the side of her aunt, whom she was clutching, and shielding from injury as best she could. Not a cry escaped her ; and in that hour, when death stared them in the face, she rose like a heroine to the occasion.

Twenty minutes passed, Robert rowing and straining for dear life, and the squall in no way abated. His hands were raw and bleeding ; his wind was nearly exhausted ; his strength taxed to the breaking-point. But, with the dogged pertinacity of despair, he kept to his task, knowing that the moment he suspended his effort their danger would be doubled.

Slower and slower grew his strokes. The strain on the unaccustomed muscles was overpowering. A

deadly fatigue seized him as he panted and laboured in his exhaustion, the sweat running from him like water. In his extremity, he taxed his brains for some means of relief; and the idea came to him that, if he could extemporise a sail of some sort, he might manage to keep the boat's head up and get steerage-way upon her.

"Lily," he cried, at last, "I'm done up! I can't keep pounding much longer. If she broaches, we shall sink."

"Let me row," she cried. "I have learnt to row."

"No. You must reserve your strength, in case—" He broke off, and added, desperately, "Oh, if I only had a sheet, or even a bath towel, I could rig it up as a makeshift, and keep the boat end-on."

"Oh, Mr. Bolt, explain to me exactly what you want," cried Lily, eagerly. "Did you say a bath towel would do?"

"A square yard of strong cloth, able to resist the pressure of the wind, would be sufficient. Search again, Lily. Isn't there an old bit of canvas of any sort? I could use an oar as a mast, and fix it up somehow. I can't go on rowing for many more minutes."

And he braced himself for a final effort of energy.

"I will search," said Lily, and he saw her vague form groping in the dark. "Would—would a—a coat do, Mr. Bolt?"

"Yes, yes. Anything that is substantial enough to bear the pressure of the wind. I would use my sleeping coat, only it is so flimsy, and would carry away in a second."

The languor of extreme exhaustion was stealing over him. He shut his eyes, clenched his teeth, and

tried to master sensibility. He called all his fortitude to his aid, as he pounded away like a horse in its last faltering stride. He would keep it up until he fell from his seat, and that, he felt, could only be a matter of a few moments now. And then—God help these two helpless women!

Suddenly he heard Lily's voice quite close to him, saying something. He could not catch her words, and he thought it was a delusion of his imagination. Then he heard her speaking again, and was conscious of her hand catching at his wrist. He opened his eyes and saw a white form in front of him.

“Eh? eh?” he cried out, confused.

“Will this do, Mr. Bolt?” came from Lily, shyly.

“What do? what do?” he asked, in a dazed way, still labouring at the oars, and wondering why he could see Lily's form so plainly now, who had been so vague before.

“It is my—my dressing-gown. It is very strong. Its linen.”

He felt her thrusting it into his hands, and then saw her shrink back.

“Thank you, thank you, dear,” he cried.

“How good you are! I believe you have saved us!”

As a fact, without his having observed it, the first fury of the squall was over, and the wind had decreased. There was something in the nature of a temporary lull in operation. He ceased rowing, shipped his oars, stepped one into the mast-hole, after threading it through an arm of Lily's dressing-gown, and bound the sleeve fast with the girdle. Next, with a rowlock, he wedged one corner of the skirt between the oar and the slack of the mast-hole, and, lastly, carried the other corner of the skirt aft,

and crouched, holding it in his hand for a few seconds to see how it answered.

It was an amazing contrivance, but it acted as a triangular storm-sail, and kept the boat from falling into the trough of the sea. All he wanted now was a rudder.

"Lily," he cried, excitedly, "it will do! Come and hold this end, dear. I must get the other oar over the stern and steer with it."

A little white figure crept timidly forward, and obeyed him. A minute later the oar was out, and Robert had the boat under control and under sail! And the sail was a dark blue dressing-gown, trimmed with lace!

"Can you hold the sheet?" he asked Lily. "I can't steer and hold it as well."

"I can hold it," she said, and settled herself to a long grip.

The long night wore itself out, and dawn broke. The squall had passed, but a stiff breeze was blowing. Gradually the light illumined the sky, and Lily dreaded the light. Shrinking there, in her white night-gown, how could she face the light?

Robert did not realise the shock to her modesty that arose from her circumstance, having far too much anxiety on his mind to think of anything but steering the boat. There was still quite enough sea on to tax his energies, and he was chilled and numbed standing up, exposed to the full blast of the wind after having been very heated with the exertion of rowing.

"Are you cold, Lily?" he asked, "can you keep up, dear?"

"Yes," she answered, and hung her head in the dusky light.

"The wind may go down at sunrise," he said. "It often does. Oh, to see the sun again!"

Which Lily thought very inconsiderate of him.

A little later and the fuller light of day revealed what the darkness had hidden. Miss Faloon was stretched out, still insensible, in the sheets, her head pillow'd on her life buoy, and her grey hair streaming over the shoulders of her dressing gown. Lily in her pretty nightgown was crouching at her post of duty, her back turned to Robert, her head bent low to hide her face. He himself was only garbed in his pyjamas and sleeping coat, but neither the unconventionality of his own or the ladies' garments occurred to him. His eyes, his hopes, his soul were focussed on the horizon, looking out for a ship.

With the rising of the sun the wind went down, and by eight o'clock the roughness of the sea was much decreased, and the weather fair and calm. The warmth of the sun brought life to the castaways. Robert felt the boat would be safe now, and that the danger was passed.

"Lily," he said, "if we are saved the world shall know what a brave English girl can do in such peril as we have passed through. You've been a 'Grace Darling' through the night!"

He hauled in the oar he had been steering with, and moved forward to relieve her and help her aft.

"Oh, Mr. Bolt, please, please don't—don't look at me!" she cried, with pretty confusion.

And then, for the first time, he realised the shock to her innocent nature that her situation must be causing her. With a spring he was in the bows of the boat, his back turned to her.

"Down with the sail, little sister," he called back to her, "and dress for breakfast! Here's a shoal of flying breakfast fish on the wing, and we may catch some if we are lucky." And he screwed himself up to a laugh to put her at her ease.

"I'm on the look-out for half-an-hour, so there's no need to hurry over your toilette."

Thankfully she seized the opportunity to make herself presentable as far as was possible, whilst Robert, standing up in the bow, swept the horizon with his eyes, and expressed the confident belief that they might sight a ship at any moment.

At last he heard her say, "I'm dressed, Mr. Bolt," and looking round, there she sat, her pretty golden hair tucked up, her dressing gown donned, and her little white feet peeping out from under her skirt. With the sun shining on the blue water, the sky blue above, and her blue eyes seeking his shyly and apologetically, as she responded to his smile, she appealed to him irresistibly.

"Plucky, pretty little sister," he exclaimed, "I'm proud of you!" And stood for a moment contemplating her with admiration as he remembered how bravely she had helped him through the dark night, and how he owed his life to her. She blushed at his praise, and then with a gesture of her hand drew his attention to her Aunt.

"Poor lady," he said, sympathetically, "We must see what we can do for her. Not much I fear, but the warmth of the sun will revive her, I hope."

They raised Miss Faloon into a sitting posture, chafed her hands, and applied such primitive remedies as suggested themselves. Presently she spoke, without opening her eyes, but it was only to beg them to leave her alone; and they were compelled to do as she wished, being helpless to relieve her.

"I think she is unconscious," said Lily, "and perhaps that is a blessing. Poor, poor Auntie!" And her thoughts reverted to the prim, prudish ways of the old gentlewoman, who was such a stickler for etiquette.

"Poor creature," echoed Robert; "it has been a terrible shock for her. If we could only sight a steamer, and get her properly attended to."

"And Uncle!" cried Lily, suddenly remembering. "Mr. Bolt, do you think he has been saved?"

He shook his head dubiously. The sinking, panic-stricken ship they had escaped from required people to be in a position to save themselves, which the General certainly was not when Robert last saw him. "I fear not," he was forced to confess.

Whereupon Lily began to cry, her nerves overstrung, and her feelings overwrought. "Oh, how dreadful, how dreadful! And he was so generous to me!"

Robert tried to comfort her, but with the complete revulsion of feeling Lily's fortitude seemed to melt away. She began to sway from side to side, her eyes closing and her hands fluttering helplessly.

"Lily, Lily!" he cried in alarm.

"I feel so strange," she gasped. "Oh, hold me, hold me! Don't let me fall into the cruel sea!"

Just in time he caught her, as she swayed forward in her seat. She fell into his arms, a little heap, and he laid her fainting form by the side of her Aunt in the bottom of the boat.

CHAPTER IX.

RESCUED !

ROBERT looked down at the two motionless forms lying at his feet and felt rather over-powered. In a crazy boat on the open sea, with two fainting women; no water; no food; not even a sail. His hands blistered and raw with rowing; his nautical knowledge of the most elementary sort; it was truly a very helpless situation. The only hope of relief lay in meeting a steamer, and he was thankful they were in the highway of traffic.

He stepped one of the oars in the mast-hole again and steadying himself with it stood up and scanned the horizon with eager eyes. There was nothing in sight; not even a cloud in the sky to suggest the smoke of a distant steamer. Then he sat down and cogitated.

Something must be done. By way of employing himself he set to work to overhaul the boat, lifting up the planks in the bottom to see if he could come across anything. All that rewarded his search was an old pannikin, and he bestirred himself to bail out the boat. Then he endeavoured to revive Lily by sprinkling her face with water, as he had done when she first fainted. She turned languidly to avoid the tepid shower. Her face was very flushed, and it occurred to him that fainting people are generally

pale, and that she might be suffering from prostration and a touch of fever. This brought him to the consciousness that the sun was extremely hot and a feeling of languor stealing over himself. It could hardly be ten o'clock; what would the heat be at noon? And in the afternoon? Something must be done to rig up a shelter from the sun's rays, for he knew that a Red Sea sun can kill as surely as its waters can drown.

He tried for a time, by standing up, to interpose his own shadow between Lily and the sun's rays, but the motion of the boat made it impracticable, and he abandoned the attempt. The heat was growing more and more intense every minute, and the necessity for shelter more insistent. There was no breeze, but a long swell on the surface of the sea, and a current which kept the boat on a course that caught the full effects of the sun.

He racked his brains how to extemporise a screen to protect Lily and her aunt. He could not use the planks in the bottom of the boat, because they were lying extended on the only ones which could stretch across it. There was only one method that presented itself, and that was to utilise one of their dressing-gowns as an awning. Then arose the question—whose should be selected? He looked down on the two recumbent, unconscious figures and calculated the superficial area of their respective garments. Miss Faloon was the taller of the two, and her dressing-gown would be the more capacious. He had almost decided to disrobe her when he checked himself. It must not be Miss Faloon! The shock of such an indignity was one which, if they were saved, the poor, prim, straight-laced old creature would never get over or forgive him for.

It must be Lily's dressing-gown. There was no alternative, for it was as much a case of life and

death as that plunge over the taffrail of the *Humber Maid*. Poor little Lily! How distressed she had been at sunrise at being seen in her *déshabille*! It pained him to have to shock her modesty again; and yet, what could he do? Unless a shelter were extemporised from the blazing sun, their lives would be endangered. Disrobe her he must!

He bent down, tapped her on the shoulder, and called her by her name. There was no response; she might have been in a trance, so complete was her insensibility. At least, she would be unconscious of what he was doing.

A minute later he had removed her dressing-gown, and was rigging it up as an awning. With dexterous hands he spread it out and made the most of its scanty capacity, tying the ends of the skirt down and the sleeves out until it threw a small patch of shade. When done, he regarded his handiwork with satisfaction.

Then he thought of himself, for he was feeling the sun badly by this time. It was almost impossible for him to benefit by the restricted area of shadow cast; but, by squatting down in the bottom of the boat, close to Lily, he was able to protect his head. Lily moved uneasily as he touched her, and turned; she was cramped and her head was resting on the hard planks. He lifted it up gently and pillowed it on his lap, and she was restful again. Having thus accomplished all that was possible for their comfort, he settled down to the task of looking out for a ship.

Two hours passed. The air was languorous and drowsy; the heat engendered lassitude. A dead calm was now on the sea, and its surface was like oil. The motion of the boat rocked it like a cradle; and, but for the thirst that tormented him, he could have fallen into a slumber. It was as much as he could do to keep his eyes open and fixed on the

dazzling horizon, and his attention alert. It was weary work looking out for a ship that did not appear, and the glare was distressing. An overpowering sense of bodily fatigue began to steal over him, and the shimmer of the sunbeams on the hazy sea made him giddy. Ever and anon, with a start, he pulled himself together, rubbed his eyes, and fixed his gaze again on the sky-line. But there was nothing to be seen; not a speck; not a cloudlet. Only the monotony of the glassy surface, catching and reflecting the dazzling rays.

About noon, as he judged it, Lily began to stir and presently to toss about. Then she opened her eyes and looked up at him dreamily, and whispered through her parched lips the single word "Water." He shook his head in hopeless negation, and she began to cry silently.

What could he do to succour her? His eyes fell upon the pannikin, and he filled it with sea-water and laved her face and hands, and made shift to fan her. She pointed to her feet, which were exposed to the sun, and he saw they were blistered with the scorching heat; so he poured water over them, and wound up by sprinkling her all over, which afforded her a little relief. She thanked him with a sad smile, and, turning over into a new position, closed her eyes again, her head resting on her arm and her golden hair straying round her face, which was flushed and feverish.

Meanwhile, Miss Faloon lay in the same torpid, unconscious state, breathing heavily. He attempted the same remedial measures with her, but they had no effect, and failed to bring her round. On the whole, he could not feel sorry; in her case, insensibility was probably a blessing in disguise.

Last of all, he moved to the bows of the boat, and, filling the pannikin with water, poured its con-

tents over himself until he had, in practice, accomplished a bath. But the scorching heat of the sun soon drove him back to the shelter he had erected, and he was glad to crouch down in the little strip of shade that was vacant.

Presently there came to him an overpowering drowsiness, and his eyes refused to keep open. For a little while he battled against the feeling, but at last gave in, and, stretching himself by Lily's side, he dropped into an uneasy sleep.

* * * *

Three hours later he was awakened by the hooting of a steamer's syren, and started into a sitting posture. His first thought, as his mind returned to consciousness, associated the sound with the *Humber Maid*. But, when he opened his eyes, recollection came back to him. Staggering to his feet, he peered in the direction from whence the sound came, and there, between him and the declining sun, and little more than half a mile distant, was a huge steamer bearing straight down on the boat.

They were saved ! With an exclamation of joy, he tore down Lily's dressing-gown and waved it frantically over his head, screaming in his excitement. Lily was aroused by his cries, and sat up, half-scared, half-overwhelmed to find how scanty was her attire. He knelt down beside her and cried into her ears,

“ We're saved, little sister ! Put on this, dear, and don't be frightened. I had to take it, in order to rig up an awning to protect you from the sun. But its all over now, and we shall soon be safe and comfortable. Only slip this on before they can see ! ”

He helped her with the sleeves, and by the time the steamer was alongside, its sides lined with a

crowd of passengers gazing intently down into the boat, Lily had nothing to blush for, and was sitting up passively, very helpless but very happy. Robert was smiling, and his strong right arm supporting her, and there was the huge, black sides of the steamer towering above them, and the long line of eager, questioning faces. She did not know what had happened, or why she was in her dressing gown in an open boat, or even how she had got there, but Robert was smiling into her face, and telling her they were saved. And her Aunt was moving feebly and trying to lift her head. She did not realise what it all meant, but Robert said he wanted her to be brave and bear up, and so she smiled, and tried to please him.

A rope was thrown into the boat and Robert seized it, and Lily tried to catch hold of it, too; and then the gangway was let down, and the boat hauled to its foot, and eager hands were stretched forward to lift her up, and carry her aboard the steamer. Only Robert would not allow anyone to do that except himself, and insisted on Miss Faloon being taken first, and he followed carrying Lily in his arms, as she had been a child, and when he got on deck, the first thing he did was to kiss her before he delivered her over to the kindly care of her own sex there to receive her.

They had been rescued by the R.M.S. *Kandahar*, bound for Bombay. All was pity and kindness and attention. Miss Faloon and Lily were soon comfortably esconced in bunks in the airiest deck cabin, with the surgeon and two stewardesses looking after them, and Robert, after refreshing himself with the most grateful drink he ever remembered to have enjoyed, and being supplied with a suit of clothes, was holding a levee on deck and answering a hundred questions put to him, and withal so modestly, you

might think it was Lily who had rescued Miss Faloon and himself and not he them.

But that young lady and her Aunt had a different tale to tell the next day, when they were sufficiently recovered to sit up on deck and relate their story. And then the true facts of the sinking of the *Humber Maid* and the rescue of the two ladies were made known. The statement lost nothing in the relation, and it would be difficult to say whether Miss Faloon or Lily painted Robert's deed in the brighter colour, or the sinking steamer and the peril of the tiny boat in the tropic squall and the dark night more vividly. In consequence, much to his confusion, Robert found himself elevated to the position of a hero, and was the recipient of many flattering compliments, especially from the lady passengers to whose admiration his conduct specially appealed.

A week later the *Kandahar* arrived at Bombay, and it was arranged that Robert should put up at the same hotel as Miss Faloon and Lily. He was recognised now by Miss Faloon as her protector, and in her helplessness she turned to him for advice and assistance. During the few days succeeding their rescue she buoyed herself up with the hope that her brother had been saved, and the first thing they did on landing was to go to the agents of the *Humber Maid* and enquire if any news had been cabled from Suez about the steamer, or survivors of the collision. But to Miss Faloon's great tribulation no news of any sort had been received, saving that the homeward bound steamer *Flintshire* was several days overdue at Suez, and the general opinion was, after hearing of the disaster, that this was the steamer which had been in collision with the *Humber Maid*, and, if the surmise were true, it was greatly to be feared that both vessels had gone to the bottom.

There was nothing left but to take rooms at a hotel, and wait in suspense for some more definite information. Miss Faloon was overwhelmed by her calamity, and by the end of a week all hope was abandoned that her brother had been saved. Several steamers arrived which must have passed closed to the scene of the collision but had no news of any sort, and at last Miss Faloon was forced to the conviction that her brother had been drowned. In her distressed and forlorn situation she turned to Robert for advice, and asked him what he thought she ought to do.

"The best thing you can do is to go up to your niece at Ramjugger, I should think."

"But I have not heard from her yet. I telegraphed the first day we arrived, but I am told it takes several days to get a reply. I begged her to send me some money for our journey. But when she does I do not see how Lily and I can travel there all alone."

"It's a most difficult journey to accomplish," chimed in Lily. "Oh, Mr. Bolt, won't you take pity on us and see us safely over our troubles. Aunt and I will never dare to venture by ourselves."

The request did not surprise him, for there had been many hints in Miss Faloon's conversation lately that she was going to ask him to extend his protection of them. It was only the uncertainty about the General's fate that led her to defer doing so. Robert had thought the matter well over from his personal point of view, and come to the conclusion that Ramjugger was probably as secluded a place as the Seychelles. He was himself in a serious fix, for all his money had gone down with the *Humber Maid*, and he had no funds, and no immediate possibility of getting any. He had made enquiries for a letter addressed to him under the name of Bolt, but there

was none. He was beholden to some of the passengers on the *Kandahar* for the money which he had borrowed from them, just sufficient to get himself an outfit of sorts and pay his hotel bill ; but this was fast melting away. And he was at his wits end to know what to do, or how to continue his flight. The opening which Miss Faloon's request suggested was particularly acceptable at such a time.

"I should like to accompany you very much," he said, and continued frankly to explain, "but I have no money. I foolishly carried my capital in gold, and I have lost it all, which makes things rather awkward for me."

"Oh, but His Highness will pay all expenses," declared Miss Faloon. "We have to cross a desert, and ride on camels, and camp out. My poor brother said it was a journey which no lady could attempt by herself. When my niece Rosalie went out he came down to Bombay especially to escort her."

"We shall never get to Ramjugger unless you help us, Mr. Bolt. Oh please come," pleaded Lily, fixing her blue eyes on him.

"Since you wish it I certainly will. And when my—h'm—remittances arrive I must refund you."

"If you come with us it must be at his Highness's expense," said Miss Faloon decisively. "My niece's husband can hardly expect us to travel alone. My poor, dear brother would not have approved of it. The customs of the Kingdom of Ramjugger must be respected. It would never do for two ladies to enter that exclusive place without a male escort. Under the unfortunate circumstances under which you are placed, Mr. Bolt, I hope you will not misunderstand me if I say we should gratefully accept your services in—in a business way. If you confer the obligation upon us you must allow me to guarantee you against any expense. Of course my

dear brother was a servant of the State, and all our travelling charges were paid by the Ramjugger Exchequer. It would never do for us to enter my niece's kingdom as two unprotected ladies."

"You are very kind, Miss Faloon," said Robert sincerely, who had acquired quite a liking for the elderly lady. "I shall be very proud to act as your and Lily's escort. And I will not deny that under the unfortunate circumstances under which I am situated your proposition relieves me greatly."

So it was decided that Robert should accompany them to Ramjugger, much to Lily's delight, who had secretly been urging her aunt to try and make the arrangement during the past week.

"Oh, I'm so happy," she confessed to Robert a little later, when they were sitting by themselves in the verandah. "I can make Rosy do anything I want, and the Rajah shall make you Commander-in-Chief of the Ramjugger army!"

He laughed at the idea, and the earnestness with which she propounded it. "I am afraid I haven't got the technical training necessary for the post, Lily. I must be content with the humble duties of Lord Chamberlain to Your Highness. I suppose you'll be transformed into a Princess now!"

"You wait," said Lily, nodding her head sagely. "You've lost all your money. Let me once get Rosy into a quiet corner, and I'll talk her round to do anything I want. Uncle always said the Rajah was entirely under her thumb. I've got a scheme in my head!" And she caught hold of his hand in her artless, joyful way, and gave it a squeeze.

The next morning there came a letter from Rosalie, written by her secretary, and expressed in the strangest language, replete with Oriental metaphor—the sort of language they call "Baboo English" in India. It was full of condolences at the

death of that "Illustrious Warrior" His Excellency Faloon; the Ranee's head was drooping like a rose at mid-day, and her eyes bedewed with the pearls of affliction. The Rajah had ordered a period of state mourning, and all the lower-caste people to shave their heads. The Ranee's respectable Aunt and her lovely sister must hasten quickly to ameliorate Her Highness's sorrow. All arrangements were made, and a detachment of State troops had been sent to the nearest railway station to escort their caravan through the desert. And enclosed were bank notes to the value of two thousand rupees to pay the expenses. Hasten quickly!

"You see," said Miss Faloon, with an echo of her former superior manner, "how exalted is my niece's sphere. State mourning ordered for my poor brother! Ah me! Ah me! And they call him the 'Illustrious Warrior!' It shows the high rank he held. To ameliorate Her Highness's sorrow. Rosy is 'Her Highness.' Thank God she is in a position to assist us."

Robert had never doubted the fact. Nevertheless it all seems to him very queer and mysterious. And without knowing why he felt glad he was going to escort these two helpless women to this far, strange country.

CHAPTER X.

HIS HIGHNESS.

THE Kingdom of Ramjugger, or "The Land of Rest," lay in the centre of that immense, arid tract of desert which stretches between the River Indus on the West and British civilisation—as represented by the Rajputana-Malwa Railway—on the East. It occupied an oasis in the sandy solitudes of Rajputana, and was so remote in its isolation that you might almost liken it to an island in the ocean. The distance between the railway and the Rajah's capital was over a hundred miles, and the journey was made more difficult by the nature of the soft, sandy road, over which no wheeled vehicles could travel.

On the morning of the third day after leaving Bombay, Robert and the two ladies reached the little wayside station at which they were to alight. Here they were met by the Rajah's Embassy, under the command of Baboo Hurry Lal, Secretary of State, and Tom Bobus, who called himself the Master of the Horse. The former was a Bengali Baboo who had received an English education, and conducted his Master's correspondence. He was an extremely stout, oily individual, a sort of human slug, puffed up with conceit at his own importance. He was dressed in the most voluminous white robes, and a muslin turban of the most prodigious size,

giving him a comic resemblance to a bale of cotton which had burst at one end and allowed a bunch of its contents to protrude. His smooth-shaved face, of a yellowish colour, was sleek and shiny, and wrinkled or creased by the folds of fat which rolled from his cheeks, chin, and jowl: but his little beady, rat-brown eyes indicated cunning. Tom Bobus was a half-caste, so dark in complexion as to be indistinguishable from the desert natives. He had been a jockey on the Indian turf until he was warned off. He then entered the service of the Rajah, and had risen to his present position by his skill in the management of horses and his sharp wit. These two men had been selected to meet the ladies because they understood English.

Great was the astonishment and dismay of Hurry Lal to find Miss Faloon and Lily escorted by a gentleman. This was not included in his programme and evidently disconcerted him.

"Who you, sir?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I am a friend of these ladies, and am going to escort them to Ramjugger."

"But the Rajah sahib only expect ladies. He no give orders 'bout any gentleman. I no 'thority to bring you along. Up train come presently. You go back to Bombay, sir," said the Baboo, in an objectionable tone of command.

Of course, Robert had no intention of returning, and he told the Baboo so plainly. Whereupon that individual began talking at him like a windbag, and, with much gesticulation, trying to impress on him the impossibility of his accompanying them without orders from the Rajah. And, in an odiously pompous manner, he urged the advisability of Robert not wasting time, but going back at once, as his master would certainly not allow him to proceed to Ramjugger.

"It is impossible for these ladies to go by themselves," said Robert, "and since General Faloon is no longer able to escort them, it is necessary for them to have me."

"Pooh, pooh!" said the Baboo, preposterously. "I see them all safe home. Plenty sowars got." And he pointed to the rag, tag and bobtail of a mounted escort who attended him, and smiled greasily at Lily to allay her fears.

"You horrid man," she cried. "I'll tell my sister the Ranee about your rude conduct. You shall suffer for it."

"Pretty Mees," murmured the Baboo, who did not seem much impressed by the threat, "you ask Rajah sahib anything and he give order. But without order gentleman cannot come!"

Without anything being decided, they adjourned to a tent which had been pitched for their accommodation, under a grove of mango-trees near the station, where dinner was waiting. It was just sunset; and the journey of the desert was always made at night, to avoid the great heat, the day being spent in camp.

Hurry Lal temporarily retired to have his own meal, whilst Robert and the ladies sat down to dinner and discussed the situation.

Miss Faloon's mind was already made up.

"Unless you accompany us, Mr. Bolt, I will never cross the desert. I am frightened of those fierce-looking mounted men. I would not dare to trust myself and Lily with them."

"They are a set of cut-throats to look at," confessed Robert. "And that fat pig's manner is most objectionable. Fancy your being expected to undertake a three or four days' journey in such company, all by yourselves!"

"Rosy will be furious when I tell her," declared Lily. "But that won't help us in the meantime."

"I feel dreadfully nervous," confessed Miss Faloon. "If I had known what a wild, deserted country it was, I should have gone back to England from Bombay. Not a house or tree to be seen! Only the endless, glistening, sandy plain! What are we to do?"

"I'll write to Rosy," said Lily. "We can wait here till we get a reply. If we had only known Mr. Bolt was coming with us, we could have told her in the telegram, and then there would not have been all this trouble and bother."

Just then a message came that the Master of the Horse wanted to see Robert outside, and he went out.

Now it happened that Tom Bobus hated Hurry Lal. There was a great jealousy between them, and whatever one did the other opposed. Each was ever striving to poison the other in their master's ears, and for this very reason the Rajah had sent them together on this journey, knowing that they would keep a check upon each other and their combined report would supply him with every item of intelligence. Tom Bobus in his former career had mixed much with Englishmen, and retained a respect for them imbued in him in his bringing up, and partly in his blood.

He touched his hat respectfully to Robert, in his old jockey fashion, and came to the point at once.

"Hurry Lal is an infernal brute," he opened, frankly, utilising what he considered to be the high-toned abuse of the turf, such as he had heard officers use in the old days when he rode for the sporting ones at the Lucknow races. "There's no holding Hurry Lal when he's got the beans in him!"

But I'll tell you what to do, sir. You threaten to report him to the Rajah *for smiling at Miss Willis*. That will frighten the cursed cow."

Robert, unacquainted with the rigorous etiquette of the East, did not understand.

"How will it frighten him?" he asked.

"It is very impertinent manners for a black pig to smile at an English lady," explained Tom Bobus. "These native dogs should keep their eyes down on the ground. Say you are going to take the ladies back to Bombay because he smiled at the Miss *Sahib*, and will write and tell the Rajah the reason, and Hurry Lal will heave his liver up with funk!"

"Thank you for your advice, Mr. Bobus," said Robert. "I'll see how it works. We have no wish to be delayed here until we can communicate with the Rajah. I'll put the screw on the Baboo."

The Master of the Horse retired, prouder at having been called "Mr." by Robert than of his official title; and Robert at once sent for Hurry Lal, and told him that he and the ladies had decided to return to Bombay, owing to the Baboo's insolent behaviour in daring to speak so familiarly to Miss Willis, and that Miss Faloon would write to His Highness and report the whole matter, whilst the young lady would send her complaint to her sister.

The effect was wonderful. It immediately reduced Baboo Hurry Lal to grovelling apology, culminating in frantic apprehension as Tom Bobus came up and begged Robert that he would disassociate him from the Baboo's insulting conduct.

"Dog, and Son of a Dog," he apostrophised the quaking Bengali, "what will the Rajah sahib say when he hears you have grinned at his wife's sister? Begone, you bloated bullock, and make preparations for starting, and give up your own riding-camel for the gentleman. And see that you

keep your ugly mug out of the Miss Sahib's sight for the journey!"

A start was made. A magnificent, huge camel, with two litters swung, one on each side, in which they could lie down, had been provided for the ladies. Robert was mounted on the Baboo's *sowari* camel, a finely caparisoned beast that could trot six miles an hour for twenty-four hours at a stretch, whilst Hurry dolefully climbed up on to the back of one of the slow-stalking baggage animals. Tom Bobus, on another *sowari* camel, attached himself to Robert, riding in the rear of the litter camel, which led the caravan, with the escort of cavalry on each flank, and the baggage camels bringing up the rear.

It was a novel experience for them, and one which Robert could enjoy more than the ladies, who were more cramped in their litters than they had been in their bunks at sea. Noiselessly the long string of camels shuffled over the sand, churning up clouds of impalpable dust, the mellow bell of the leader sounding musically and in rhythmic cadence. The brilliant light of the stars shed a subdued glow, and by the stars the well-trained desert trackers set their course. The air would have been cool but for the hot evaporation that emanated from the baked sand. Silence brooded around, save when from the far distance the mournful cry of a jackal or the incongruous laugh of a hyæna broke on the ear. Into the unknown misty plain they struck, and to Robert's unaccustomed eyes, seemed to lose themselves in it, and he marvelled to think that these nomad folk could guide their way so unerringly, and wondered what an Englishman would do if he chanced to get lost in such a trackless, indefinite waste.

The journey took them four nights, their pace being adapted to the slow progress of the baggage

camels, which travelled at about two-and-a-half miles an hour. Tom Bobus told Robert it was quite possible to travel the entire distance in twenty-four hours on one of the fleet *sowari* camels, such as they bestrode, but the jolting effect on the rider was too much to be endured by delicate English ladies, who could travel with less fatigue in this tedious way.

During the day time they encamped, tents were pitched, and they all slept during the mid-day hours. Water they carried with them, there being only one well in the entire route. The days were very hot, and so, too, were the early part of the nights, but towards morning it became quite cold for a couple of hours, and the ladies were glad to descend from their cramped litters and walk the last mile or two into the camping place. Miss Faloon suffered considerably from the fatigues of the march, but Lily seemed to delight in it, though that was, perhaps, because she had Robert with her and the increasing intimacy that these novel conditions caused.

Baboo Hurry Lal was contemptibly humble and obsequious, keeping his eyes on the ground all the time he was in the presence of the ladies, and striving to propitiate their anger by his servile attentions to their requirements. But he did not fail to notice how the Englishman, who had reproved him for smiling at Lily, was ever smiling at her himself, and determined the Rajah should be informed of it. He spied on them like a snake in the grass, concocting a report to be whispered in the Rajah's ear before Tom Bobus could formulate his. Moreover Hurry Lal knew certain things of which the Master of the Horse had not been informed, and he had a reason for spying on Robert.

On the other hand Tom Bobus became most attached to Robert. The ex-jockey was the only person with whom Robert could converse, except

Hurry Lal, whom he loathed. Bobus was not a bad little fellow apart from his sporting morality, and through these long night rides he came to appreciate the kind treatment he received from an Englishman who did not treat him like a "nigger," chatted freely with him, gave him cigars and qualified the brackish water with whiskey, of which the jockey was very fond. Such condescending behaviour as this had never been experienced by Tom before from a *sahib*, and it was vastly gratifying to his vanity, who, although in the Rajah's favour, was looked down upon and despised as a "Christian" in Hindoo Ramjugger, especially by Hurry Lal, who ever referred to him as the "unclean" one.

At length Ramjugger was reached about nine o'clock on the fourth morning after they started. An express camel-*hircarra* had been sent forward on the previous day to announce their arrival, and the Rajah came out of his walled capital to meet the caravan, attended by a great retinue.

He was a young man of about twenty, but enormously stout. His features were semitic in cast, and his complexion light, but his huge double chin and sensual lower lip, his small cruel eyes and immature beard gave him a singularly bestial appearance. He was driven out in a carriage drawn by four horses, and as he descended from it the thought passed through Robert's mind—"Poor Ranee Rosalie if that is her lord and master!"

The ladies were in their litters, for the pace of the camels for the last three miles had been accelerated. At a sign from the Rajah their camel was halted, and directed to squat, whilst His Highness eagerly enquired which was the Miss *Sahib*'s litter. It happened to be the one further from him, and he waddled round in a hurry to receive her as she stepped from it. And as her litter touched the

ground and Lily put her head out of the curtains, she caught sight of his huge, repulsive face, and gave a scream.

"My pretty Mees," he said (who could speak English after a fashion), "Velcome to Ramjugger!" And drawing the curtains further aside he peered at her with his greedy eyes, and a leer on his thick lips.

Knowing he was going to greet the English "Miss" (as unmarried girls are called in India) the Rajah's retinue discreetly hung back, so that no one but he was on that side of the camel. Robert hearing the scream escaping from Lily hurriedly dismounted from his camel. He had expected the Rajah would give the ladies time to prepare themselves to receive him, for they travelled in *deshabille*, and the jolting invariably disarranged their hair. His Highness had taken no notice of Robert's presence, his whole anxiety being to see Lily, and when the former reached the litter there was the fat brute endeavouring to kiss her hand!

It was but the work of a moment to interpose, and with means more forcible than polite Robert thrust the Rajah back.

His Highness was thunderstruck at these impious hands laid on his sacred person. The next instant his fingers fluttered about the handle of the jewelled dagger he wore at his girdle, as if he would there and then revenge the assault. Whereupon Hurry Lal, darting forward, threw himself between them. A few words in the native tongue whispered in the Rajah's ear, and his manner was changed. He smiled at Robert in a sickly way, and said, "I did not see you. I wish you good day."

And Robert, not knowing exactly what to say, and disarmed by the apparent civility, responded, "Good day."

Meanwhile Lily had scrambled out of her litter, ignorant as yet who the fat native was, and ran round to her Aunt's side. She was trembling with indignation and alarm, and her fair hair, which had become uncoiled, was streaming down her back.

"Auntie, Auntie," she cried, "there is a horrid black man who has tried to kiss my hand!"

The Rajah, with a whispered word to Hurry Lal, waddled after her, and when Robert attempted to follow, the Baboo interposed.

"Sir," he said, "this not proper conduct! His Highness come here to welcome ladies on behalf of Ranee. You no interfere, or you get into trouble. You push Rajah sahib again and he put you in prison! This Mees is Rajah sahib's wife's sister. My master bring message from sister."

And then Miss Faloon's voice was heard, "Good gracious me! His Highness himself! How do you do, your Highness? It is indeed condescending of you to come so far to meet us! Lily dear, this is your brother-in-law. What is the matter with you? Why don't you shake hands?"

~~SBT~~ "I too much glad to see you, pretty Mees, good Madam," came the Rajah's reply. "Come, come! Enter carriage. I drive you to my Palace. Everything ready got."

"This the Rajah!" cried Lily, in a voice of undisguised repugnance, "Oh, I couldn't have believed it!" Then she called out, "Mr. Bolt, Mr. Bolt, please, please come here."

Robert was round in an instant, and just in time to prevent the Rajah catching her by the hand with the object of forcing her into his carriage.

"You must come with us, Mr. Bolt," cried Lily. "He wants me to get into the carriage, but I won't go alone."

The Rajah looked black. "No room," he said, abruptly. "I send nother carriage for gentleman. Why you not tell me him coming. What for he come? I no invite."

"We could not travel without a gentleman to protect us," exclaimed Miss Faloon, "My poor brother's death left us alone."

"Pooh, pooh, good Madam," said the Rajah. "I protect. What can strange gentleman do in my country? Better go back. No good here. To-morrow I lend him quick camel, and he go back. Come pretty Mees," and he put his hand out coaxingly to Lily.

But she hung back, clinging to Robert.

"Lily dear," protested Miss Faloon, "When His Highness—"

"Auntie," cried Lily resolutely, "I don't care what you say! I'll never, never move from here without Mr. Bolt. I'm frightened of all these black men with swords and guns," pointing to the retinue who were crowding round, and eyeing Robert fiercely, "What does it all mean? This isn't what Uncle said it would be like!"

There was no mistaking her determination, and the Rajah recognised she was obdurate. Perhaps, too, he was influenced by something Hurry Lal whispered into his ear. At any rate he suddenly gave into Lily. "Very well," he said with a scowl, "As pretty Mees pleases. Gentleman come. Good Madam come. All come."

With that he climbed first into the carriage, and made room for the three of them, but so arranging that Lily sat by his side. And in this way they made their entry into his capital.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RANEE ROSALIE.

THEY entered the city walls and drove through the crowded bazaars, all the inhabitants of which prostrated themselves to the ground as their ruler passed. From the upper windows, the veiled faces of hundreds of women peered inquisitively down. A salute was fired in honour of their arrival, and when they reached the Palace, a large body of troops drawn up in front of it presented arms.

The Palace was situated on the western side of the town, and built on the ramparts, under which a shallow river ran over golden sands. It consisted of a conglomeration of rambling buildings, walled-in and strongly fortified, and connected with one another. They were grouped in an extensive quadrangle, and in the central space was a parade-ground. The entrance was through a formidable gateway, built in the eastern wall, which practically made the Palace a sort of citadel apart from the city, and, in the bloody past, it had more than once stood a siege when massacre and revolution followed on the death of a ruler and his sons fought for the succession. The Rajah's quarters overlooked the river; those to which his guests were taken formed the left wing as you entered, and had formerly been inhabited by the General. A suite of apartments in them was furnished in the European style.

"Where is my niece the Ranee?" asked Miss Faloon, directly the carriage drew up. She had expected to be met and welcomed by Rosalie personally.

The Rajah pointed across the parade-ground.

"That is Her Highness's Palace. She will receive you to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried Lily. "Oh, but I want to see her at once."

"Ranee not very well to-day, pretty Mees. To-morrow soon come," explained the Rajah, grinning and leering at Lily.

"This is a great disappointment, Your Highness," protested Miss Faloon. "If she is indisposed, I ought to go to her. I have no doubt I can do her good."

"To-morrow," repeated the Rajah. "I have promise her to-morrow. In my country, what promise, that do. Nothing else. King's word never change."

He motioned with his hand to one of the many attendants to open the carriage-door, and indicated that the ladies were to alight, but without rising from his seat.

Robert stepped down and gave his hand to Miss Faloon, and then to Lily, whom the Rajah ogled as she passed him, much to her indignation. She had been seated next to him, and throughout the drive he had kept his eyes fixed on her in a most objectionable way, which made Robert feel inclined to kick him. But he put a restraint upon the display of his feelings, for it suddenly burst upon him that he was in a very helpless position in this strange, crowded native city, and that it would be prudent to confine himself to observation and not to action.

Studioignoring Robert, the Rajah salaam'd politely to "Good Madam," kissed his fat hand to

"Pretty Mees," and drove off, leaving his guests to find their way to their apartments as best they could. Hurry Lal, who was mounted on a sleek mule, ambled after his master; but Tom Bobus stayed behind, and, slipping off his horse, came to Robert's assistance.

"The Rajah's jolly waxy," he said. "You took him by surprise, Mr. Bolt. And there's that cow Hurry Lal going to get his ear first. I suppose he'll have a hundred lies to say against me! I will show you your rooms, and then I must leave you, for I am sure to be summoned to make my report."

"Was my niece the Ranee indisposed before you left Ramjugger?" asked Miss Faloon.

"Oh, ma'am, how should I know? The Ranee lives in the Zenana Palace, and all is secret that goes on there."

"It is very extraordinary—her not meeting us." Tom Bobus shook his head.

"The Ranee is not allowed to go out of the Zenana Palace. No one has seen her for a year."

"Is she kept prisoner?" asked Lily.

"All zenana ladies are kept prisoners in this country," explained Tom Bobus; "it is Rajpoot custom."

At this moment a *sowar* came galloping back from the Rajah to order the immediate attendance of Tom Bobus. "I must go," said the latter. "That son of a pig, Hurry Lal, has been making mischief. The Rajah is furious about something. I will see you later on if I can. You must give what orders you have to the servants; they were in General Faloon's service, and will know how to wait upon you. If you want anything let me know," and with a salaam to the ladies, the little ex-jockey mounted his horse and rode off to the Rajah's Palace with something of a perturbed air on his dusky face.

There were a dozen attendants collected in a semi-circle to receive the Rajah's guests under the command of a grey-bearded *Khansamah*, or major domo, who possessed a smattering of English. With obsequious respect he ushered them into the building, and through a series of blank, cheerless rooms, opening one into the next, until they reached the late General's apartments. These were situated on the second floor, and in a wing of the Palace that looked on to the river, which made a bend at this point. The Palace itself was built on the ramparts which rose about thirty feet above the bed of the river. Everything was ready for the reception of the two ladies, but no preparations had been made for Robert, and it was proposed to put him into a room some little distance from those assigned to Miss Faloon and Lily. But this would have isolated them too much in the big, rambling building, and they both insisted on his being provided with a chamber nearer to them. It was arranged by Lily sharing her Aunt's room, and giving up hers to Robert, who took up his quarters therein.

Truth to tell, without being in any way able to formulate his fears, he did not like the aspect of things. He realised for the first time how completely cut off they were from civilisation. The alleged indisposition of the Ranee Rosalie could not be said to account satisfactorily for the prohibition to see her, and it was easy to gather from Tom Bobus's words that there was something more than etiquette to account for the seclusion of a niece from her own Aunt. The conditions around them were new and strange, and Robert felt uneasy with vague suspicions.

Miss Faloon and Lily, perhaps because they had been prepared for novel experiences by the General, were more curious than concerned about their surroundings. Rosalie's indisposition troubled them

far more than their environments, but their anxiety was purely about her health. Miss Faloon had been greatly impressed by their reception; the cavalry escort, the salutes from the cannon, the prostration of the populace as the Rajah passed through the city, the imposing proportions of the Palace, the numerous attendants ready to receive them, and the idea of being domiciled in a "Palace" had a dazzling effect on her simple mind. She was beginning to be carried away again, and to believe that here was the actual realisation of all those grand and romantic stories which her late brother had retailed with so much gusto. As for the Rajah he did not assume the same disagreeable aspect to her elderly eyes as to Lily's girlish ones. It was evident he was a great potentate, the ruler of this country, and the master of the picturesque soldiers who loomed large in Miss Faloon's uncritical eyes. She knew, too, he was the fountain of the wealth her brother enjoyed, and in her secret soul harboured hopes of a pension—that being one of the possibilities her brother had hinted at. Under these circumstances she was prepared to see a great deal more good in the Rajah than might be apparent to anyone less dependent on his generosity, and was inclined to make the best of him.

Of course Robert did not mention the misgivings that he felt. They were, indeed, too undefined, and he had no desire to alarm his charges. They were to see the Ranee Rosalie to-morrow, and would learn everything from her; and it might turn out, after all, that his fears were the product of his own imagination.

All that day they were busy unpacking and settling themselves. Their apartments consisted of a large room, divided in the centre by a screen to serve as a dining and sitting-room, and a couple of

bedrooms, which opened into it. The windows of the big room looked on to a balcony which commanded a full view of the river. At the back of the bedrooms were the bathrooms common to all Indian houses, with outer doors leading on to the ramparts, or rather an enclosed portion of them. Some cane chairs, and a few shrubs and flowers in pots suggested that the General had used this as a sort of garden lounge in the cool of the evening. The view was wild and bleak, for, to ensure the privacy of the Palace, no habitations had been allowed on this side of the city, and the plain stretched away as far as the eye could reach until it merged in the distant desert which surrounded Ramjugger.

In the cool of the evening the Rajah came to pay them a formal visit, attended by his officers of state and an escort of cavalry. But no one accompanied him into the ladies' apartments, that being contrary to native etiquette. On arrival His Highness looked very displeased at seeing Robert, and told him curtly that this was a "family" visit to "Good Madam" to discuss private matters, and that Robert's presence was incorrect, which left the latter nothing to do but to retire.

The "private matters," as Robert heard from Lily, were really nothing at all. They resolved themselves into flattering speeches, and the presentation of some gifts. Those for Lily were jewels of considerable value, which the Rajah insisted on hanging round her neck with his own hands; to which she submitted under her Aunt's direction. For Miss Faloon there was a Cashmere shawl, which threw that good lady into an ecstasy. After this presentation there were more compliments to "pretty Mees," and an intimation to Miss Faloon that the Rajah regarded her in the light of a mother, which was very flattering to her vanity. It was apparent

that her head was being turned, much to Lily's dismay, who did not at all approve of the Rajah's attentions, or the frequent promptings from her Aunt to respond to them. When His Highness perceived her distaste for his favours he applied himself to increased adulation of the elder lady, whom he completely fascinated.

So greatly was Miss Faloon deluded that it came to an argument when she and Lily discussed the Rajah's visit during dinner. Lily expressed her opinion of him in very outspoken terms, and wondered how her sister could ever have brought herself to marry such an odious creature. Whereupon Miss Faloon reproved her sternly, and declared that His Highness was generous and polite, and his hospitality unbounded. She instanced the reception that had been prepared for them, the servants placed at their disposal, the beautiful presents he had given them. His manners might be a little strange to their eyes, but then, he had not been brought up as an Englishman, and nothing could be more gracious than his behaviour. They must remember that he was her nephew by marriage and Lily's brother-in-law, and should be the first to make allowances.

But Lily tossed her pretty, golden head.

"He may be my brother-in-law, Auntie," she exclaimed; "but I hate him already! What right has he to pinch the back of my neck? That is what he did, when you insisted on my letting him fasten the necklace. I wish I hadn't accepted it from him!"

And she unclasped it, and threw it on the floor, in an ebullition of disdainful temper.

"For shame, Lily!" her aunt reproved her, as Robert picked the necklace up. "You forget, now that your poor uncle is no more, how dependent we are on His Highness. You must treat him with consideration. We are very poor, and cannot afford to

quarrel with our richest relative. He has shown himself disposed to be most kind and generous, and we should be grateful instead of critical."

She ended her speech with a confirmatory nod of her head.

The next morning, a messenger came from the Rajah, to say that he would call for the ladies at noon, to escort them to see the Ranee Rosalie; and shortly before that hour Hurry Lal arrived, and informed Robert that of course he could not be one of the party, as the Rajah's Zenana was the most sacred and exclusive place in the Palace, where never a man—saving husband, father, or brother—is allowed to enter.

So Robert stayed behind, and Miss Faloon and Lily drove off with the Rajah to the Zenana Palace across the parade-ground. On the way the Rajah told them that Rosalie was still ill, but the doctor who was attending her—a native who had been educated at the Calcutta University—hoped she would soon recover her health.

As befitted the Ranee's high estate, the reception was to be in the form of a native *durbar*, or State audience. On arrival at the Palace, Miss Faloon and Lily were ushered into a large, dim Hall of Audience, at one end of which two thrones were erected and opposite them a couple of chairs. Gaunt, cadaverous-looking men guarded the entrance—men of the class that are employed in the East to serve in the women's apartments. The Hall itself was filled with zenana women squatting on the floor, who all rose and salaamed respectfully as they entered. The Rajah led the two ladies to the chairs and, taking his seat on one of the thrones, gave a signal. Whereupon, the curtains were drawn aside from a door at the back of the Hall.

There was a hush of expectancy, and then a woman's figure was seen advancing. Supported by two women attendants, she slowly and—it might almost be said—drowsily permitted herself to be led to the second throne, and sank into it.

It was the Ranee Rosalie, drugged almost into stupefaction!

She was hardly recognisable. The bright, beautiful English girl of eighteen years of age, who had left England less than two years ago, was changed into a wan, listless woman, who might have been taken for thirty. Her face was pallid and drawn, her eyelids heavy, her body emaciated. She seemed unconscious of her surroundings, and moved like a person walking in sleep. She was dressed in a native costume of silk, gorgeously embroidered with gold filigree work, and her whole person literally blazed with jewels.

In the dim light, Miss Faloon failed to recognise her niece; but Lily knew her, in spite of her altered appearance.

"Rosy!" she cried; and, springing forward, encircled her with her arms. "Rosy, can this be you?"

"Lily," responded the Ranee, in a dazed voice, and gazing into her sister's face with a haggard, incredulous expression.

Miss Faloon took a step forward and cast one affrighted look at her niece. Then she turned on the Rajah, "Your Highness, what does this mean? You never told me Rosalie was so ill! Oh, my child, my child," she exclaimed, folding the Ranee to her breast, "Why did you not let us know you were so ill?"

"Good Madam! Pretty Mees! Please remember," broke in the Rajah, hurriedly. "We are at *Durbar*. The Ranee little sick; soon get well," and seizing Rosy by the wrist he drew her back, and

interposed his own person between her and her Aunt and sister. Then, at a sign, from him, several women attendants crowded round the Ranee, and occupied themselves with fanning her, whilst others partly compelled, partly persuaded Miss Faloon and Lily to resume their chairs.

Without releasing his grip of her wrist the Rajah seated himself on his throne by the Ranee's side, and bending over whispered a few words into her ear. Under the threat they conveyed the poor creature made a feeble effort to smile, but terror of the tyrant by her side was clear writ in her features. But at this sign of animation a murmur rose from the women grouped around, and a gust of conventional compliments flattered her ears.

Then the Rajah began talking in a superficial way to divert attention, and give Rosalie time to recover herself more fully. He held forth about the great honour the two ladies had done him in coming all the way from England to visit his Court, and with what joy he and the Ranee were glad to welcome them. He assured them their arrival would certainly effect a cure of the Ranee's cruel complaint. See! the roses of health were returning to her cheeks already! With Good Madam and Pretty Mees to cheer her the Ranee would soon be well again. Apartments should be prepared for them in the zenana palace, which he hoped they would regard in the light of their home.

"Then let it be at once," cried Miss Faloon, "Oh, Rosy, I and Lily will come and nurse you, dear."

But, strange to say, instead of showing pleasure a look approaching consternation spread over Ranee Rosalie's face. The grip of the Rajah's fingers still encircled her wrist, and his keen side glances watched her narrowly. She seemed in some mysterious way under his spell, and her very tongue appeared to be

tied, for, except when she had pronounced her sister's name, she had not spoken a word. It was as though she were the victim of an hypnotic influence and unable to assert her independence.

On the other hand Miss Faloon's willingness to take up her residence in the zenana Palace gratified the Rajah greatly. "That all right, Good Madam," he said; "You come, pretty Mees, come to Ranee's Palace to-morrow. Not to-day. Must make preparation. Ranee very pleased you coming. Ranee want you to come, eh? eh?" he peered round at Rosalie, waiting for her to confirm his words. But she held her silence. Whereupon he whispered into her ear, and waited again for her to speak. But she would not. There was a look of horror in her face, only it was subordinate to her terror of this man who held her in his grasp, and was her master.

"Rosy, what is it, darling?" asked Lily. "Why don't you speak? Auntie and I will come and nurse you and love you. Oh, Rosy don't you want us to come?"

"Ranee very much want," declared the Rajah, "only she too much happy. She little ill. Cannot speak. This surprise sudden!"

"Sudden surprise," exclaimed Miss Faloon; "How can it be a surprise after all the letters we have written?"

"Letters," echoed the Ranee, faintly. "I have never heard of your coming until to-day!"

"What!" cried Lily, "You have not received our letters?"

"She forget," interposed the Rajah grimly, and, rising, made a sign to some of the women who surrounded the Ranee. "Fever take her memory away. Fever coming on again. Ranee want medicine. No can talk more. Durbar finished. To-morrow you will see. Then she remember everything. You wait

till to-morrow. Then you come and nurse Ranee, and she soon get well. To-day ill—oh, very ill. No memory got. Fever last night. Make good-bye, Rosalie. Tell Good Madam, tell pretty Mees come and nurse you, come and make home in zenana palace. You hear? Tell! Tell quick!"

He clenched her wrist, as a hawk might hold a pigeon in its clutch, striving to elicit from her the invitation which he wished her to extend to her Aunt and sister.

"Tell quick! Tell quick," he repeated, sternly.

But the poor, crushed creature, who had been in his absolute power for the last year, and whom he fondly imagined was reduced to a state of abject subjection with not a spark of independence or self-assertion left, revolted against his order. The sight of her little, innocent sister Lily had stirred within her a sense of overpowering suspicion and dread. She knew nothing of the circumstances which brought them here; she was unaware that her Uncle, the abandoned and unspeakable villain who had wrought her destruction, was dead. But her woman's instinct told her the vile plot intended, and despite her terror of the tyrant she was determined to give a warning in the faint hope that the calamity she feared might be averted.

"Lily," she cried, suddenly. "*Prenez garde!* *L'homme noir*—"

"What you telling?" broke in the Rajah, his suspicions instantly aroused, "What language you talking?"

"*Prenez garde!*" repeated Rosalie, her voice rising to a loud scream.

The Rajah shouted an order in Hindustani, and in a twinkling the Ranee was lifted off her feet and carried from the Hall of Audience in a swooning state.

CHAPTER XII.

PRENEZ GARDE!

WHILST Miss Faloon and Lily were away at the Women's Palace, Robert sat in the balcony, smoking a cigar and gazing out at the sunshine lying like a gloss upon the plain. It was a typical Indian scene. The camels stalking slowly along; the peasants ploughing with buffaloes; the gardeners working at the Persian wheels and irrigating their fertile patches of land; and the veiled women going to the river to fill their water-vessels, which they carried balanced on their heads, and oftentimes with a child a-straddle on their hips. Then there were fields of sugar-cane along the river's banks, interspersed with groves of date-trees, and the narrow ribbon of verdure that followed and bordered the river's course; whilst to westward, where the cultivated area merged into the glistening desert, there presently appeared a mirage, as the noonday sun reached its meridian height and painted the horizon with the most exquisite pictures of lakes and islands and green oases.

Gazing on these unaccustomed sights, the spirit of the desert and its freedom appealed to Robert. Here he personally was as safe as if he had been in the Seychelles. It would require a marvellous detective intelligence to track his footsteps to Ram-jugger! As a City of Refuge for a fugitive it was an

absolutely perfect place of retreat; and, but for these vague fears that haunted him, he knew not why, what a pleasing holiday he might have enjoyed here. But something told him there was no permanence in the present arrangements, and that the position he was in was as false as that of the two helpless women Fate had entrusted to him. But there was one consolation—the suspense would not last long. They would hear what sort of a place this Ram-jugger really was from the Ranee Rosalie, and how they had best act.

Whilst he was indulging in these speculations, Baboo Hurry Lal was announced, having returned from escorting the Rajah to the Women's Palace. He had a message—or, to express it more correctly, an order—for Robert. The Rajah desired him to depart from Ramjugger at once, and a riding-camel and escort would be ready that night to take him to the railway, which he would reach by the following evening.

"I don't see how I can go," Robert objected. "I must consult the ladies before I can give you a reply."

"Must go, sir," said the Baboo, with insistence. "My master give order. He no ask you here. Why you come?"

"I came because the ladies desired my protection, and I certainly shall not depart unless they are satisfied they want it no longer."

"Rajah sahib give plenty protection. By-and-by ladies go to Women's Palace and live with Ranee. What good you do?"

To this question Robert had no reply ready, so he fell back on his original protestation—that he would not leave the place until the ladies had expressed their wishes on the subject.

The Baboo seemed greatly mortified.

" You give me answer in writing, sir, and I show Rajah. When he give order in Ramjugger everyone obey. Rajah sahib will be very angry with me. He give strict hookum send sahib away to-night."

" Fiddlesticks," said Robert, contemptuously. " I've given you my answer. I'm not going unless the ladies desire it. I will ask them, when they return, and let you know."

Hurry Lal retired with a disappointed face. He saw a difficulty in dislodging this sahib, who treated the Rajah's orders with such scant respect; and, as the task would fall to him, he did not appreciate the situation.

About two o'clock Miss Faloon and Lily returned, weeping and agitated. The shock of seeing Rosalie had prostrated them. They told their story to Robert in a vague, incoherent way. Miss Faloon had conceived the idea that her niece's brain had been affected by fever; fever always made people delirious, and her conduct had been so strange. Indeed, she did not appear to know what she was doing or saying. His Highness had explained that her head was affected by the fever; but Miss Faloon feared it was worse than that, and that her poor niece's mind was deranged. She had swooned off, and her attendants had been obliged to carry her away. And twice she had cried out "*Prenez garde!*" which this simple woman could not understand at all!

Lily was almost hysterical. She was sure Rosy was dying, and those piteous cries of hers—*Prenez garde*—meant something she was afraid to say in English. There was trouble on her mind which she was too confused to explain. The Rajah was holding her pulse all the time, and said she was in a high fever. She looked dreadful as they bore her away—like a corpse in jewels !

What seemed incomprehensible to these two poor women, whose minds were distracted and rendered blank by the sudden shock they had experienced, was clear as daylight to Robert. *Prenez garde*—take care! That was no unintelligible exclamation of delirium, but the warning of affrighted despair.

“When are you to see her again?” he asked.

“We are to go to the women’s Palace tomorrow to nurse her. The Rajah proposed it,” said Miss Faloon.

“And what did your niece say?”

“She said nothing,” explained Lily. “I don’t think she understood. She looked in great pain and bewilderment. She hardly recognised me, and was not a bit like my dear sister who was always so bright and gay and loving. The Rajah answered for her. He said she was most anxious for us to go and look after her.”

“Was it after this that she said ‘*Prenez garde*’?”

“Yes. When she was being carried away.”

“Miss Faloon,” said Robert decisively, “you must not go to the women’s Palace. You must insist on your niece being brought here to be nursed.”

“Not go to nurse her? But why?”

“‘*Prenez garde*!’ ‘Take care.’ That was to warn you not to,” said Robert.

“To warn us not to! And she so ill! She did not know what she was saying. We must go. It is our duty,” said Miss Faloon.

“To warn us!” echoed Lily, “warn us against what?”

“I cannot tell you,” said Robert. “But I have a conviction that you ought not to go to the women’s Palace. Let the Ranee be brought here.”

“Mr. Bolt, you take an extraordinary view of our duty towards our dear one,” said Miss Faloon

reproachfully. "We have come out to visit her. She is dreadfully ill; not fit, I am sure, to leave her bed. Of course we must go and nurse her. And since my poor brother is no more, surely my niece's palace is our proper home?"

"I beg you not to go," said Robert gravely.

"But Rosy will certainly not come here, and she will never get well unless we nurse her," declared Lily. "It would be wicked and cruel to leave her to those horrid black people. They are all very attentive and assiduous, but they cannot understand her wants as we can. Even the Rajah is anxious that we should go."

"I can only express my opinion," said Robert.

"But what has led you to form it?" asked Miss Faloon.

"Chiefly this warning, '*Prenez garde.*'"

"Oh, but I tell you Rosy did not know what she was saying," insisted Lily. "She was far too ill."

"And what is there to take care of? What danger can there be in the Queen's Palace? The Rajah is everything that is considerate and polite. He seems most anxious to make us comfortable and at home. He told me we were to regard Rosy's Palace as our own home. Oh, no, Mr. Bolt. We must go and nurse her; we really must," declared Miss Faloon.

What could Robert do? If they did not perceive the warning that was intended to be conveyed, how was he to persuade them? He had no proofs to offer; he could not even put his suspicions into reasonable terms. He had nothing tangible to put forward; it was all doubt, surmise, distrust. He could not explain to himself what his exact fears were. All he knew was that he had an undefined but absolute conviction that this was no place for two unprotected women like Miss Faloon and Lily,

and this was strengthened by the anxiety which was apparent to get rid of him.

And now it was Robert's turn to give them his information, and he told them of the message he had received from the Rajah, through Hurry Lal, to leave that evening, and that a *sowari* camel would be ready to take him to the railway after sunset.

"What!" cried Lily in consternation, jumping up and running towards Robert, "The Rajah wants you to go? Oh, but you shan't—you shan't! I'll never consent to it. If you go Rosy shall go, and I'll go and Auntie shall go. And I'll tell the Rajah so!"

Miss Faloon was quite as much concerned at the idea of losing Robert, though she did not give such a display of her feelings. "There must be some mistake," she said, "I will speak to His Highness. He cannot understand our situation. I hope and pray Mr. Bolt you will not think of leaving us? I never anticipated such a thing! We are so dependent on you. What did you tell Hurry Lal?"

"I told him I would be guided by your wishes."

"And you won't leave us, will you?" cried Lily, seizing him by the hand.

"You may be sure I will not," he promised her.

"The Rajah is coming to see me this evening on family business," said Miss Faloon. "He gave me to understand that he desires to make a permanent provision for Lily and myself. He asked me if my poor brother had mentioned the matter, and I told him he had hinted at it. I will speak to him about this strange proposal that you should leave. There must be some mistake. I can't understand it at all. His Highness is all politeness, and so anxious to make Lily and myself feel quite at home. He said we had only to express a wish and it should be executed."

"Well, we'll leave it there," said Robert. "Under any circumstances you may rely upon me to stop. But I tell you frankly I believe the Rajah gave the order that I should depart."

"I'll give him a bit of my mind," cried Lily, "The horrid man!"

"I hope you'll do no such thing, Lily," said her Aunt reprovingly. "Remember, dear, how dependent we are upon His Highness. You must leave this arrangement to me. We must be diplomatic just now, when he is so well-disposed. You heard what he said, when we were driving back?"

Tiffin—the Indian luncheon—was served, and they all sat down to the table; but Miss Faloon and Lily were too upset to eat anything. They could think and talk of nothing but the Ranee's illness; and, as they recalled and discussed anew the events of the Durbar their anxiety increased. Robert tried to induce them to eat; but even the beautiful fruit for which Ramjugger was famous, the luscious custard-apples and perfumed guavas, failed to tempt them. Their thoughts were in the sick chamber of the Women's Palace, and nothing would satisfy Miss Faloon but to get out her medicine-book and study it. She had all the old maid's anxiety to try her hand at doctoring.

Robert led Lily out on to the balcony, to enjoy the slight breeze which was blowing.

"Isn't it dreadful, poor Rosy being like this, Mr. Bolt?" she asked Robert. "Oh, how different it has all turned out to what I imagined it was going to be! Poor uncle gave us such glowing accounts about the life here, and the Rajah, and all the luxuries, but he never said anything about being ill. Fancy my sister all by herself in that huge Palace, with only those black women around her. And that horrid

Rajah! How ever she could have married him I cannot tell! Isn't he——*piggish*?"

"He certainly is not a fascinating individual," assented Robert.

"And Auntie says she is not disappointed in him! I am. He is not a bit like the photograph uncle showed us. That was such a handsome face! But the Rajah's makes me shudder!"

"Tell me, Lily, what is your Aunt's real opinion about him?"

"I don't think she has formed a real opinion. All she thinks of is what he is going to do for us. She has an idea he is going to settle a handsome pension on her, as a reward for uncle's services. You know, Auntie has been very poor; and she always makes the best of the chances of life, poor dear. And the very idea of a pension is enough to turn her head."

"I don't like the Rajah, Lily,"

"And I hate him," said Lily.

"And I don't like the thought of your going to the Women's Palace. I don't think you ought to go."

"But we must go, for Rosy's sake."

"If you go there how am I to communicate with you?"

"Communicate with us! Why, we shall see you every day, of course," declared Lily.

"I wish I could be sure of that," said Robert, with a dubious look on his face. "It seems such a shut-off sort of a place. I shan't feel happy when you're out of my sight."

"Won't you?" said Lily, colouring with pleasure at the form of his expression. "I wouldn't go, if it were not for Rosy. We shall see how she is to-morrow; and if she is better, I will make her come here. But I'm afraid she is dreadfully ill, and I

cannot bear to think of her in that huge palace all by herself. Suppose I were ill, Mr. Bolt ; you wouldn't let Auntie leave me there, all by myself, would you?"

"God forbid," ejaculated Robert, gravely.

"Well, then, how can you object to our going there when my sister is so ill?"

This was an argument Robert was not prepared to answer, and he abandoned the discussion.

"And how do you think you will like Ramjugger?" he asked Lily, by way of changing the subject.

"If Rosy was quite well, and—and *you* stayed," she answered, artlessly, "and the Rajah didn't come very often, and I had all the things uncle promised me—it might be very nice, mightn't it? Its very comfortable here, and very quaint and novel. Fancy living in an old palace like this. And its not so very, very hot. I wonder when the Rajah will give me a horse! Will you take me out riding? How I should enjoy a gallop across that plain! It is so unfortunate Rosy being ill. She was to have done so much for us!"

At this moment one of the servants came into the balcony, saying Hurry Lal desired to see Robert again.

They returned to the sitting room and the Baboo was ushered in. He expressed a desire to see Robert in private, but Miss Faloon, who had anticipated his mission, desired him to state his business. With some hesitation he came out with it, repeating the request he had made earlier in the day, that Robert should depart from Ramjugger, as he had come there without an invitation and His Highness was not prepared to entertain him.

"Oh, but Mr. Bolt cannot leave us. You tell the Rajah that," said Miss Faloon. "I was going

to speak about it when His Highness comes this evening. I am sure the Rajah will not be so disobliging as to send away the gentleman who has escorted us here."

"Rajah sahib very angry," said Hurry Lal; "Why Mr. Bolt come? No invitation got."

"I will explain to His Highness," said Miss Faloon.

"Explanation no good. Mr. Bolt push Rajah sahib when he meet pretty Mees. That great insult. Black man do that and him put in prison and have him hand chopped off! Rajah sahib say, 'Tell him go; tell him go quick!' Rajah sahib never forgive insult."

This was a new idea. Robert had forgotten all about the little contretemps of their first meeting when the Rajah had startled Lily as she was getting out of her litter. It was true he had given His Highness a push, but it was with no intention to be disrespectful to him, and it surprised him to find that the memory of this was rankling in his mind.

"I am sorry if I have unintentionally offended His Highness, and you can tell him so," he said to Baboo Hurry Lal; "but as for going, I cannot do so because the ladies wish me to stay."

The Baboo shook his head. "No good. Rajah sahib too much angry. Sowari camel come this night and you go."

"That I certainly shall not," declared Robert.

"Rajah sahib make you go," declared the Baboo, with scarcely veiled insolence.

"You horrid man," burst in Lily, who was boiling over with indignation, "I will tell the Ranee about you. If Mr. Bolt goes we will go, too. Tell the Rajah that!"

This declaration appeared to surprise the Baboo exceedingly. "Rajah sahib not let you go," he said. "You come here to stay with Ranee. Everything

ready for you. But this gentleman, he come without leave. No invitation. And he very rude to Rajah sahib. What for he stop when Rajah sahib want him to go? That not proper; that not custom. This Rajah sahib's city. How can gentleman stay here when Rajah sahib angry and want him go?"

"I will not discuss the matter with you," interposed Miss Faloon, primly. "You are very rude. I have told you that I will explain to His Highness——"

"My orders too much strict," said the Baboo, persistently.

"Look here, clear out of this," said Robert, who was beginning to lose his temper. "The ladies wish me to stay, and I'm going to stay. If I have to go I shall take them with me. And now, no more of your chattering," and with that he laid his hand on the Baboo's shoulder and pushed him from the room.

Considering this rather unceremonious dismissal of Hurry Lal it was a surprise to Robert to find him turning up again a little before five o'clock, at which hour the Rajah had arranged to call on Miss Faloon, with a smiling face and unctuous politeness. This time he had a more agreeable proposal than before. The Rajah had sent a carriage for pretty Mees, so that she might enjoy a drive whilst he was discussing business with her Aunt, and a riding horse for Mr. Bolt. There was no mention now of his going, and the Baboo was most obsequious in his attentions. There were the Rajah's Zoological Gardens to be seen, and the racecourse, where Robert might enjoy a good gallop and try the mettle of his mount.

This was an agreeable change to being urged to depart. Lily dressed herself, and Robert escorted her to the entrance of the Palace, where one of the Rajah's carriages was drawn up, and a gaily caparisoned horse, held by two grooms, ready saddled for him. And who should be in charge of the escort

but Tom Bobus, in his capacity of the Master of the Horse. He was standing by the carriage door with the broadest grin on his face, as if he were in the merriest humour. But as Robert caught his eyes he made an almost imperceptible sign which carried a warning with it.

And then, as Robert was handing Lily in to the carriage, the little ex-jockey bent forward and whispered, "Don't ride that horse. It is a man-killer. Make excuse and get into the carriage." And grinned broader than ever as he ostentatiously invited Robert to mount his steed.

Robert kept his presence of mind ; walked slowly towards the horse ; affected to look it over, and then said :

"But this is a native saddle ! An Englishman cannot ride except in an English saddle," and turned back to the carriage as if offended at the slight to his dignity.

"Get English saddle, quick, quick !" cried Hurry Lal, who was standing by, to the Master of the Horse. " You silly fool, Tom Bobus, why you put on native *zeen* ? "

" I cannot wait," said Robert. " I will ride to-morrow," and opening the door of the carriage he entered and seated himself beside Lily, thankful she had not heard Tom's warning.

" So," he thought to himself, " this is how the land lies ! They evidently want to get me out of the way ! And in default of my going of my own accord, they arrange for an accident. By Jove, things are beginning to look blacker than I thought they were ! "

Then he turned to Lily and during the drive did his best to amuse and cheer her, though he was sick at heart with foreboding of evil and dread of unknown dangers.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VILLAINOUS PROPOSAL.

THE short twilight of an Eastern land was fading into dusk as Robert and Lily returned from their drive. It had done Lily good and she was in more cheerful spirits than at any time since she had seen her sister. To be with Robert constituted a large portion of this young lady's present idea of bliss, and he had been particularly kind and tender to her. The sense of protection was strong in him, and she submitted herself very prettily to be protected. As she nestled by his side in the carriage, holding his hand, seeking to divert him with her innocent prattle, and displaying her unmistakable feelings towards him in the expression of her pretty face he was fain to confess that he had grown fonder of her than he had hitherto suspected. And the idea of leaving her and Miss Faloon alone in this isolated native city, if so be the demand for his departure were renewed, grew more repugnant to him than ever.

They reached home, and passing through the long series of gaunt, empty rooms which led to their apartments, found Miss Faloon awaiting their coming. No sooner had they entered the room than she rushed forward towards Lily with a cry of relief, and encircling her in her arms, burst into hysterical tears, much to Lily's alarm and to Robert's amazement.

It was some moments before she could recover herself, and even then would not explain what had upset her to Lily. The latter instantly suspected it was some bad news about her sister, until her Aunt reassured her on that point.

"Then what is it, Auntie?" asked Lily with a scared face.

"It is—is business trouble," answered Miss Faloon; "I must consult Mr. Bolt. Go to your room, dear, and wait till I come to you. I won't be long."

No sooner were they left alone than Miss Faloon turned to Robert. "Oh, Mr. Bolt, the most awful thing has happened. I don't know how to tell you!"

"What is it?" he asked, grimly, fearing ill.

"The Rajah wants to—to *marry* Lily!" she gasped.

"To marry her," echoed Robert in a stupefied voice. "The Rajah to marry Lily! Oh, the villain, the unutterable villain!"

"He came here to make a formal proposal."

"That he should have dared to do so!"

"He said she should be his first queen."

"Hush," said Robert, putting his finger up to his lips; "Lily must not hear a word of this. Come into my room and tell me everything," and he led her there and cautiously closed the door.

"How can I tell you? There is something more horrible still. The Rajah says I brought Lily here to marry him! That is what he understood. Can you conceive such a thing?"

"Is it possible?" asked Robert. "That would explain much. But I can hardly believe it of—of—"

"Oh, no, no! Don't believe it! My poor brother is dead and cannot defend himself. It is a falsehood

of the Rajah's I am sure. What would have happened if you had not come with us?"

"Try and give me an account of your conversation," said Robert. "We must get to the bottom of this."

"When he first came he began by paying me all sorts of compliments. He told me he wished me to take charge of the women's Palace, and that I was to have an allowance of a thousand rupees a month. Of course I could not but express my gratitude at such a handsome proposal, and I confess I was rather carried away by my feelings. Then he said all I had to do was to send you away to-night, and to-morrow he would marry Lily! It nearly took my breath away, he said it so decidedly as though it were settled."

"What did you do?"

"I asked him how he dared to propose such a thing."

"And then?"

"He evinced surprise, and asked me for what other reason I had brought Lily to Ramjugger."

"Yes?"

"I told him we had come to visit my niece—Lily's sister."

"And then?"

"He began to try and argue with me. People did not come such a long journey merely for a visit. Now that I had come, would it not be better to make my home here? My brother was dead, and what reason had I for going away again? I should be very happy here, and have plenty of money, and so would Lily, and what more did I want? I tried to make him understand that no English lady could marry a man who had another wife; that it was illegal and impossible, and against our religion. He replied that his religion allowed him to have two

wives if the first one had not borne him any children. He must have a son to succeed him on the throne. He was English in ideas, in education and feelings, and he wanted an heir by an English wife, and that was why he had sent for Lily!"

"Sent for her? Can it be possible that he did send for her with such an object in view?"

"I don't know, I don't know," cried the poor old lady, wringing her hands in her anguish, and then burying her face in them and sobbing. "He said we were here now, and we could not go away. He was our natural protector and guardian now that my brother was dead. And then he went on to say how much he admired Lily, and how beautiful she was, and that he would load her with jewels, and she should have everything she desired, and so should I. I kept on telling him it was impossible, impossible. This made him angry, and he asked what I would do if I left here. He even reminded me that I owed him two thousand rupees, and would have to pay it back before I left. And how was I going to get away? I said you would take us away, and this made him very angry, and he said you had no power to interfere, and he should not let you do so. He would have you turned out of this city. You had no right ever to have come here without leave, and I should be very foolish if I depended upon you, because you could do nothing."

"We'll see about that," said Robert, hotly. "But tell me, what was the end of the interview?"

"When he saw I was obdurate he tried bribing me. How much money did I want for my niece? he asked. I told him I would not listen to him if he spoke in that way, and that directly you came back I would tell you, and you would take us away at once. That made him laugh, and he said we should never get away from here unless he gave the order.

We were in his power, and he had been put to great expense over us, and he was not going to let us go."

"The scoundrel! So he tried to intimidate you!"

"Yes. But I think he saw he had made a mistake, for he changed his tone when I dared him to do his worst, and began wheedling, and asked me to state exactly what was my objection to the marriage. I told him the fact of his having one wife made it against our English laws for any Christian to marry him. If he had been unmarried it might have been legal, but as it was there *could* be no marriage. Again he tried to argue, but I declined to listen to him any further. Then he said he would give me a few days to think it over, but I told him if he gave me a hundred years my answer would be just the same, for I never would or could consent to my niece marrying a man who had a wife alive. And for Lily, I said, she would kill herself sooner than do so. That seemed to impress him, for he lapsed into thought for some minutes. At last he said, 'Very good. I go away now. Come again and have another talk with Good Madam. Make new arrangement to please Good Madam.' And with that he left, just a few minutes before you returned."

"Thank God I brought a revolver with me," said Robert as he unlocked his portmanteau and brought one out. "He is a fool as well as a villain to have disclosed his plan before he got rid of me. I'll shoot him dead without compunction."

"Oh no, no," cried Miss Faloon in great alarm, fearing from the expression on Robert's face that he was going to sally forth there and then to do so. "That would only make matters worse. We must leave Ramjugger. Oh, my poor Rosy, what will she think of us deserting her? But how can I keep Lily here another day?"

"The question is how to get away," said Robert gravely.

"The Rajah cannot keep us by force?"

"There's no knowing what he can or cannot do."

"You were to have left to-night. Why not say you have decided to start, and demand camels for us all."

"I will demand them," said Robert, "but I do not know that it will do any good. The difficulty is to keep Lily ignorant of what is taking place. You must invent some explanation for the agitation you displayed. The poor child must never know of this abomination! Go and comfort her, and allay her fears if you can. Meanwhile I will send for Hurry Lal, and see if we can get camels to carry us back. But even if they are supplied it will be a terrible risk with these treacherous devils!"

He opened the door and saw Miss Faloon to her own room, and then summoning one of the servants sent for the Baboo, who turned up in about a quarter of an hour.

Robert thought it best to assume an air of authority with him. "The ladies are going to leave Ramjugger to-night," he said. "You must supply camels to carry them across the desert."

"I get Rajah sahib's order," answered Hurry Lal.

"Very well. And tell the Rajah this; that I hold him responsible for the safety of the ladies, and that after his interview with Miss Faloon to-night I forbid him to speak to them again."

Hurry Lal opened his eyes very wide at this masterful language, and stared at Robert.

"Go at once and do my bidding," cried the latter, stamping his foot impatiently, but conscious how impotent he was to compel the execution of his orders, and what a very slight prospect there was of their being obeyed. But in the terrible dilemma he

was in he conceived a bold front was the best one to offer.

The Baboo departed without another word, wondering what this sudden change of plans meant. Then Robert went to Miss Faloon's room and found her and Lily busily engaged in packing their things.

"Come and have some dinner," he said; "they're just bringing it in. We must fortify ourselves for the journey. Hurry Lal has gone to see about the camels."

"Oh, Mr. Bolt, why are we going without saying good-bye to my sister?" cried Lily. "What will Rosy think of us? And all because Auntie has had a quarrel with that horrid Rajah. I wish you would send for him and let me speak to him. I'm not frightened of him like Auntie is."

Robert cast a questioning glance at Miss Faloon. "Lily does not understand money matters," said that lady, "or how impossible it is for us to remain here any longer."

"But it's so despicably mean to leave poor Rosy because there has been a fuss about money," protested Lily. "Mr. Bolt, do please explain to me what it is all about, and why we *must* go."

"You wouldn't understand if I did try to explain," said Robert, shirking the difficulty, "but I want you to believe me, Lily, that it is absolutely necessary for us to go." He spoke very gravely and looked earnestly into her eyes as though to convince her by his serious demeanour.

"I am sure I could understand if you told me," said Lily, "I am not such a child as all that!"

"Can you trust me, Lily?" asked Robert, taking her hand in his, and pressing it gently.

"You do not need to ask me that question," she answered.

"Then trust me in this matter. Do not ask any questions. Miss Faloon has a great deal of anxiety on her mind, and so have I. What we are doing is what is necessary to be done. Help us, dear, and do not hinder us by asking for explanations."

His voice of tender appeal touched Lily's heart. "I won't ask a single question," she said, "I'll do just as you tell me."

He bent down and kissed her on the forehead, "Brave little girl," he said, and thanked her.

They returned to the sitting-room and sat down to dinner. It seemed to Robert that there was a change in the manner of the native servants, and he noticed that the *khansamah* who understood a little English, did not once leave the room, but planted himself behind Robert's chair as if to listen to what was said.

Directly the meal was over Miss Faloon carried Lily back to their room to complete the packing, whilst Robert hurriedly bundled his things into his portmanteau. As he was doing so Hurry Lal was announced. This time he came attended by several of the Rajah's officials, all of whom carried swords.

"Well?" said Robert, interrogatively.

"Rajah send camel," said the Baboo. "All ready for you to go, sir. This *jemadar*" (he pointed to one of the attendants) "will take you to railway by to-morrow night."

"What are the arrangements for the ladies?"

"Rajah sahib give orders ladies not to go."

"But they insist on going."

"Can't help," said Hurry Lal, stolidly. "Rajah sahib give orders ladies not to go."

"Then I shan't go."

"Rajah sahib give orders you *must* go."

"There is no 'must' about it. I'm not going without the ladies. I insist upon camels being provided for them."

The Baboo laughed in a superior way. "You speak very foolish way, sir. This Rajah sahib's city. What good your giving orders? Ladies belong to Rajah sahib's zenana. Hindoo law give him power over them. Ranee very sick; they go to zenana to nurse Ranee. That Rajah sahib's orders. Go to-morrow, and you go away to-night."

"You infernal scoundrel, how dare you address me in this way? I'll report the matter to the Viceroy."

"Very good. Camel all ready. Make report. Come!"

"I refuse to go without the ladies. I will see the Rajah to-morrow, and he shall be sorry for this treatment!" cried Robert.

"If you not go, these men make you go," threatened the Baboo, and gave an order in the native language which caused them to advance towards Robert as if to seize him.

In an instant Robert whipped out his revolver. "The first man that touches me I'll shoot dead," he exclaimed.

They had not expected to find him thus armed and prepared, and at the sight of his weapon they all fell back with cries of alarm, after the characteristic manner of natives. The noise they made brought Miss Faloon and Lily running out of their room to see what was happening, and there was Robert standing with his pointed revolver, and half-a-dozen armed black men grouped about the door.

Miss Faloon gave a shriek, and Lily rushing up to Robert, took her place by his side, brandishing her little fist at the men. At the same moment the servants came hurrying in.

"What is the matter?" asked Miss Faloon, in trembling accents.

"They want to make me go without you," explained Robert. "They actually had the audacity to try and compel me! And I told them I would shoot the first man who touched me."

And now Hurry Lal, who saw that his attempt had failed and matters gone too far, came cringing forward, trying to propitiate Miss Faloon. "Mr. Bolt make mistake. These men only going to get his box to take to camel. Please, good Madam, tell Mr. Bolt go away quietly. Two, three days Rajah sahib make all *bundebust* for good Madam and pretty Mees to go. No can make all at once. Rajah sahib take good Madam and pretty Mees to railway himself. Only Mr. Bolt must go. Rajah sahib insist on that."

"You horrid man," cried Lily indignantly. "We won't stay here a minute without Mr. Bolt."

"Tell His Highness nothing will induce us to stay here without Mr. Bolt, and that when he goes we go, too."

"Now you've got your answer from the ladies," said Robert, "go and deliver it to your master."

"But, sir—," expostulated Hurry Lal, "Rajah sahib give orders and I must obey."

Robert recognised the futility of argument with such a man. By way of terminating it he advanced with his revolver presented at the Baboo's head. "Clear out," he cried, "and let me see no more of you. You have my answer and the ladies' answer. I do not leave without them, and they will not leave without me. Tell the Rajah that! And tell him that directly I get back to British territory I shall make a full report of his treatment of us."

Robert's bold attitude saved the situation. The Baboo was afraid to take the responsibility of re-

sorting to force whilst there was a revolver muzzle covering his precious carcass. With a muttered order to his subordinate he withdrew, cursing his fate that had sent him on such an expedition to fail so ignominiously, and dreading the anger of his master.

And now Robert had all his work cut out to comfort and encourage Miss Faloon and Lily. There was no disguising the fact that they were in a precarious position. He tried to make light of the attempt that had been made to compel him to leave, but no brave words from him could disguise the seriousness of what had happened. What added to his difficulty was that Lily had to be kept in ignorance of the real reason of all these troubles. Fortunately Miss Faloon showed a spirit and courage for which he would never have given her credit, and assisted him to lull Lily's fears, and induce her to retire to bed after every precaution had been taken to lock and barricade the door that led into their apartments.

But there was little sleep for Miss Faloon and Robert that night. The former lay awake, thinking of her two dear girls whom she had brought up since their childhood, and glancing at Lily sleeping by her side unconscious of the fearful peril she was in. And Robert in the next room was wondering how he was going to save these two helpless women committed to his charge.

The utter helplessness of his position, so far away from all civilisation, so completely in the power of the Rajah, burst on him in all its true force. Were he by himself escape from that desert-surrounded city would be difficult; but to convey these two ladies away seemed almost hopeless. The physical difficulties were too great to be overcome; that hundred miles of waterless desert interposed a

barrier as complete as that of a stone wall. He must have assistance, and to whom could he appeal for it?

Suddenly the recollection of Tom Bobus flashed across his mind. The little ex-jockey had proved a good friend to him to-day when he had warned him against the man-killing stallion. He must communicate with him by hook or by crook. Hurry Lal was his avowed enemy, and would doubtless keep an eye on the Master of the Horse and prevent his calling on Robert, but there must be someone amongst all these native servants that were waiting upon them who would be open to a bribe, and convey a note to Tom. The idea brought a gleam of hope to his mind, and turning it over and over he fell asleep towards daybreak. Only to be awakened at sunrise, when the air was rent with the most lugubrious notes of native horns sounding a series of long-prolonged, dismal howls. The sounds came from all over the city in a sort of concerted chorus. Unaccustomed to the indications of native music Robert could not imagine what these hideous noises implied. Rising from his bed he went out on to the ramparts at the back, from whence he could obtain a glimpse of the parade ground. A great crowd was gathering on it, and he could make out individuals beating themselves and tearing their hair, whilst they emitted wails and groans even more lugubrious than the sounds of the horns.

In some alarm, and fearing that this gathering might augur ill, Robert went to the sitting-room, unbarricaded the door, and summoned the *khansamah*.

“What does all this commotion mean?” he asked.

“Bad news! Bad news!” said the sycophantic old grey-beard. “English Ranee die last night!”

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEEK'S REPRIEVE.

NEVER in all his life had Robert a task of greater anguish than that of breaking the news of the Ranee Rosalie's death to Lily and Miss Faloon. He did it as tenderly as he could ; but the shock went home, and carried with it utter prostration.

"She has been murdered," cried Miss Faloon.
"I know she has been murdered."

And she drew Lily on to her lap, and encircled her with her arms, as though she feared a like fate for her.

"Hush," said Robert, and gave her a warning glance. "You must not harbour such ideas, Miss Faloon. She was ill yesterday——"

"But she was not dying," broke in Lily.
"Auntie is right. They have murdered her, and now we shall all be murdered ! I know there is danger, or you would not have decided to leave so suddenly. I see now why you wanted to leave and would not tell me the reason."

It was of little use for Robert to try to argue otherwise ; and, indeed, his argument was but half-hearted, for he, too, had the conviction that there had been foul play. Poor Miss Faloon was persuaded that it was indirectly her fault, inasmuch as she had told the Rajah that the fact of his having a wife was

an insuperable obstacle to his marriage with anyone professing the Christian religion; and there crept into her mind unthinkable ideas of what his object might be. In deepest sorrow and tribulation, mixed with the gravest anxiety, they passed the morning, dreading the next development of the tragedy.

About mid-day, Hurry Lal was announced with a message from the Rajah, and desired to see Miss Faloon; but Robert told him that was out of the question, and that, if he had anything to state, he must say it to him.

Whereupon he made his announcement—that Her Highness the Ranee had died of fever last night, and, producing a written document,

“This is doctor sahib’s certificate,” he explained.

Robert read it through, and found it to be what Hurry Lal had asserted—the immediate cause of death being certified as pneumonia supervening on fever. It was an astute device to safeguard the Rajah against any share in her death.

“When is the funeral going to be, and where will the remains be buried?” asked Robert, who had promised Miss Faloon to read the service over the dead.

“No bury; burn Ranee,” answered Hurry Lal. “Hindoo never bury dead mans; always burn. Hindoo Rajah’s wife, she burn, too. Go to burning ghaut presently. See! All people come to pay dutiful respect and help carry wood.”

“I forbid this,” cried Robert, indignantly. “We bury our dead, and say Christian prayers over them. The Ranee was a Christian, and she must not be burnt with heathen ceremonies. It is an outrageous and indecent suggestion.”

“Rajah sahib make order burn Ranee. That proper Hindoo custom. Ranee become Hindoo queen when she marry Rajah,” said Hurry Lal, with decision.

"It is outrageous," declared Robert, as he recalled to mind how cremation effectually destroyed all traces of poison. "I must see the Rajah about it."

The Baboo shook his head.

"That no possible. Rajah sahib he make strict mourning one week. Shave him beard, live in one room, no see anyone only Brahmin priests. He send message to good Madam; one week, then he come see her. And message to pretty Mees, he very sorry her sister dead. And he send message to you, sir. This no time to receive visitor. All city in mourning, and all strangers send away. All this week no one eat, only cry. Strange peoples all go away. Therefore Rajah sahib say now you go away."

"I am quite ready to go directly the Rajah provides camels for the ladies," said Robert.

"Ladies? Oh, ladies not go! Only strangers go. Ladies belong to Rajah sahib's family. Ladies must make mourning. That proper custom. How can ladies go, and Ranee dead? Good Madam and pretty Mees they must cry and make sorry. Then after one week all bathe and put on new dresses and make feast. That Hindoo ceremony. No can do without Good Madam and pretty Mees."

"I have told you, the ladies insist on going; and, now that the Ranee is dead, they will not stop a day. You know quite well that I will not go without the ladies."

"Sir," said the Baboo, argumentatively, "you one very foolish gentleman. You no understand Hindoo custom. Better go, sir, better go. More wise. Why you stop here and get in trouble?"

"I will never go unless the ladies accompany me," declared Robert.

Hurry Lal shrugged his shoulders.

"You one very foolish gentleman," he repeated. "I give you plenty good advice and you no listen.

Ladies belong to Rajah sahib's zenana. You no right to interfere. Rajah sahib master here, not you. Rajah sahib plenty times tell you, go. You not go. You very foolish gentleman." And, with a prodigious nod of his head, Hurry Lal waddled off, with the air of a man who washes his hands of further responsibility in a disagreeable matter.

Robert returned to Miss Faloon and informed her of the communication Hurry Lal had made.

"I don't know what to do, or what to advise," he said, frankly. "I feel utterly impotent. If these men choose to keep us here, I don't see how we can get away! We are in a veritable trap."

"Supposing you leave," suggested Miss Faloon, "and get back to civilisation, and obtain help?"

"I don't believe I should ever reach the railway," said Robert, gravely, "even if I could bring myself to leave you and Lily. They have gone too far to let me escape. They want to get me away from you, and then——"

"And then—what?"

"Who knows?" said Robert. "There must be a hundred ways of getting rid of a man in such an out-of-the-way place as this."

"Do you mean they would dare to murder you?"

"They would encompass my death, doubtless," said Robert.

"It is too horrible to think about," cried Miss Faloon. "Oh, my poor, sweet Lily, what shall I do to protect her?"

"Thank God, she is still ignorant of her peril. But, suppose you make one last effort to move the Rajah. Write him a formal letter, demanding that arrangements shall be made for your return to British territory. Point out to him that, with the death of your niece, the Ranee, all your concern or

connection with Ramjugger has terminated. I do not think it will have any effect, still you can but try."

"I will write," said Miss Faloon, and drafted a letter, in consultation with Robert, which she despatched to the Rajah. The answer came back that His Highness was too prostrated with grief to attend to letters. At the same time there came a counter-move from Hurry Lal, in the shape of a formal notice to Robert to quit Ramjugger forthwith or suffer the consequences.

He tore the document up, and threw the pieces in the messenger's face. The retort was a guard of soldiers set at the doors of their Palace, with the evident intention of arresting and deporting him directly he issued forth. For once, the etiquette of the East stood the ladies in good stead. It is an unheard-of thing to invade "women's quarters," and it was their presence that saved Robert from being forcibly seized. So long as he was with the ladies, he was in a sort of sanctuary; at any rate, during this week of mourning.

It did not take him long to discover that they were in a state resembling one of siege; or, at least, one in which safety depended upon not stirring out of their apartments. The servants continued to wait upon them, but they no longer pretended to any obsequiousness. The doors were kept shut, and there was an evident watch upon their actions, but there was no active interference with their liberty within doors. The strict mourning ceremonial of the Hindoos for the deceased wife of their ruler procured for them a week's reprieve. It was a week of negation, during which no business of any sort might be performed.

Robert's one hope now was to get into communication with Tom Bobus, but he knew it must

be done secretly. To this end he searched the faces of all the servants, to see if there was one he might dare to trust ; but the old greybeard *khansamah* kept too close a watch on them, and was himself too notoriously a spy for Robert to run the risk. It was clear these domestics were really his jailers and the greybeard the head jailer, and one object they had in hand was to steal his revolver, as he realised when he found that his spare cartridges had been abstracted from his portmanteau. This was a grievous loss, for it left him with only the six he had in the chambers of the weapon.

On the third day, however, going into his bathroom, he came upon the *bheestie*, or water-man, a humble individual he had not observed before. It was this man's custom to haul up the household water by a rope let down over the side of the lofty rampart, his mate below filling the waterskin in the river and attaching it to the rope. This saved the *bheestie* the trouble of a long journey round and carrying the water up the many stairs. Robert watched him at the operation, saw him complete it, and then roll up his rope and hang it on a peg with the mechanical air of a man who has been doing the same thing, in a settled way, times innumerable.

Here was an avenue for escape ! If Robert could only communicate with Tom Bobus, some means might be devised for making use of this discovery. The question was—could the ex-jockey read ?

He must chance it. So he wrote a note, in a copy-book hand, asking Tom Bobus to come at midnight to the spot where the water was hauled up over the rampart, and whistle, and Robert would lower the rope and haul him up. He told him he had certain proposals to make which might result in something greatly to Tom Bobus's pecuniary

advantage ; and he called upon him, in the name of their common Christianity, to help.

The next day Robert watched for the *bheestie*, managed to make him understand what he wanted, gave him a handful of rupees, and promised him a hundred more if he conveyed the letter to Tom Bobus. At the sight of more silver than he had ever seen in his life before, the man was easily won over, and that evening he delivered a slip of paper to Robert on which was written, " Sir, I have received your letter, and will come to-night."

Robert made no mention of what he had done to Miss Faloon or Lily, not wishing to raise hopes which might turn out false. They were in a sufficiently dejected state, mourning for the Ranee Rosalie, and he had no desire to augment their sorrow.

A little before midnight he rose and reconnoitred the balcony, from which a flight of steps led down to the ramparts. To his surprise, he found a couple of servants sleeping there ! They were evidently supposed to be watching. He dared not step over their bodies, so he returned to his bath-room and descended by the narrow, steep flight of steps by which the *bheestie* brought in the water. Reaching the parapet, he leant over, and gave a low whistle.

A faint one answered him from thirty feet below. He lowered the rope, felt a signal tug, hauled it up, hand over hand, and the next moment was grasping Tom Bobus's hand, and making the little black jockey prouder than ever at this mark of condescension from an Englishman.

" Tom," he whispered, " you are a Christian. I am a Christian. I am going to speak to you as man to man, and I am going to trust you."

" You may safely trust me, sir," answered Tom Bobus. " No white gentleman has ever treated me

as you have done. I have tried to get into touch with you, for I know the danger you are in; but I am closely watched. Hurry Lal is suspicious of me, and he has his spies looking after me. But I am small and agile, and can climb, or I should never have got here to-night."

"Are you guarded, too?" cried Robert. "I was going to ask you to make your way to British territory and summon help."

Tom Bobus shook his head.

"I should be caught before I got a mile away, and how could I cross the desert?"

Robert's heart fell. If Tom could not escape, how could he ever hope to get Miss Faloon and Lily away?

"Listen to me, Tom," he said, "and then we must put our heads together and see if we can arrange a way of escape for the ladies, who are in dreadful peril." And he gave him a full account of what the last three days had revealed, and their present condition of virtual imprisonment.

Tom listened attentively and then he related what he had heard, for he had learnt much during the last few days, when the real intention with which Lily and her aunt had been induced to visit Ramjugger had leaked out. The whole story transcended anything Robert could have imagined of a white man's villainy. The General, Tom declared, had been taken into the Rajah's service, and elevated to high rank and a princely salary, on condition that he obtained an English wife for the Rajah every year! It had been his own proposal to the boy ruler, first made when the Rajah was a youth of sixteen and much spoiled by the European ladies of the hill station where he was being educated. A very precocious youth—as all Indian boys are, who habitually marry at fourteen and fifteen years of age

—into whose ears Faloon whispered vicious promises of what he would do when the Rajah was his own master. On the strength of these vile promises, the Rajah had sent for Faloon when he came into his majority and the possession of full power, about three years previously. The first victim had been a French woman of ill fame, whom the General had decoyed from Calcutta ; she had drunk herself to death in the Women's Palace. Ranee Rosalie was the second ; and when the Rajah tired of her, he sent the General home to England to get him another wife, under threat of depriving him of his post and emoluments if he failed to please the Rajah. The latter had seen a photograph of Lily, and been much attracted by it, and had promised the General a munificent reward if he could introduce her into his zenana. The death of the General had disarranged this unspeakable plot, and Robert's presence with the ladies further complicated matters. Had it not been for him, Lily would have been taken to the Women's Palace when she arrived, and the ceremony of marriage, such as it was, dispensed with ! It was now given out in the city that the Rajah proposed to marry Lily, and his "new English wife" was the talk of the population !

Robert reeled against the wall as he heard this terrible revelation.

"And the Ranee Rosalie," he gasped, "what did she die from ? Was she murdered ?"

"She was well just before you came. When the Rajah told her Miss Faloon and her sister were coming to live in the Women's Palace, she understood what it meant, and grew frantic with grief and indignation. Then they gave her opium, to make her quiet ; and threatened her with all sorts of things, if she would not assist the Rajah in his design. But no, the Ranee vowed and swore she would warn her

sister. So they gave her more opium, and drugged her until she had no sense left. And last evening, when the Rajah came back from his interview with Miss Faloon, he gave secret orders, and——”

Tom Bobus nodded his head, leaving the hiatus to complete his sentence.

“My God,” cried Robert. “What am I to do? How am I to save these poor creatures? Tom, you must help me—you must find out a way. How can we get a message to British territory?”

“They suspect me,” said Tom, “because you allowed me to ride by your side, and talked with me in such a friendly way as we came here. And you gave me cigars and *shraab* (whiskey). And Hurry Lal knows it was I who warned you against mounting that horse. It is a tiger, and has killed a dozen men. It was intended it should kill you. The Rajah has given the order that you are to be killed; by some ‘accident,’ if possible; but, if it comes to the pinch, you will be assassinated, directly you leave the ladies. It is only whilst you are in their apartments that the sanctity of the zenana protects you. They are looked upon as belonging to the Rajah’s zenana. And, during this week of mourning, the superstition of the Hindoos prevents them from taking any active measures for encompassing your death. But you are in grave danger, sir.”

“Don’t trouble about me,” said Robert. “All the same, I thank you for your warning, Tom. But I have a revolver, and they know it, and are afraid of it. It’s the ladies we must think of.”

“And have I not been thinking of them?” asked Tom. “There is only one person who could help.”

“Who is that?” asked Robert, eagerly.

“The Ranee Dewali.”

“Who is the Ranee Dewali?”

"She is the Rajah's chief wife, of his four native wives. She is frightfully jealous of these English wives, and would poison them if she could. She has borne the Rajah a son who will succeed to the throne, and she has great power."

"Tom, Tom, you must communicate with her. You must persuade her to help us."

"I will if I can. But Hurry Lal is very cunning. He has even greater power than the Ranee Dewali. And they do not know, in the Women's Palace, that Miss Willis does not want to marry the Rajah. They think she came out for that purpose; and no native woman can imagine one of her sex unwilling to marry a Rajah. The Ranee looks upon Miss Willis as her greatest enemy and rival."

"Tell her the truth. Tell her Miss Willis will regard her as her greatest friend if she will only help her to escape."

"I will try," said Tom. "The Ranee Dewali is a clever woman, and she may be able to do something. She might even get us two or three *sowari* camels, and then, if the ladies could descend—"

"I can lower them over the ramparts," said Robert, "if you can only provide camels."

"It is difficult for a man's voice to penetrate into the zenana," said Tom. "But, if I could get the ear of the Ranee, she would manage it, for there is no spur so strong as that of jealousy."

"You give me hope," cried Robert, wringing Tom's hand.

"I will do my best," said Tom, preparing to let himself down over the wall. "Hang this rope out every night for three hours. I can climb like a monkey. Keep watch. Be ready to leave at an instant's notice. God is great," he wound up, piously, "and—perhaps!"

And disappeared.

CHAPTER XV.

A POISONED CUSTARD APPLE.

ROBERT drew up the rope, restored it to its place and crept cautiously back to his room, where he sat down to think over all Tom Bobus had told him. How was he to act now? To what extent could he take Miss Faloon into his confidence? She was a nervous woman by temperament, and prone to agitation. To reveal to her the full depth of her late brother's infamy would double the shock, and render her less capable of keeping her head clear. Her mind was tormented enough about her nieces, and it would be cruel to add to her tribulation. Of course Lily must be kept in ignorance of the fate premeditated for her, and to assure this he required Miss Faloon's co-operation. He determined, therefore, to disclose nothing of the real plot by means of which they had been brought here, but to confine himself to a few of the facts he had learnt from Tom Bobus, namely about the Rajah having four native wives already, and that their one hope lay in obtaining the assistance of the chief of these wives in procuring camels by means of which they might make a secret flight. And this he did the next morning, impressing the necessity of herself and Lily sleeping fully dressed, and prepared for instant departure any night.

If it were possible to increase her loathing and detestation of the Rajah, Miss Faloon found a reason

in the fact that he had married Rosalie when he had already four native wives. That was the last drop in the brimming cup of his vice and wickedness, and to think that he dared to contemplate introducing Lily into his zenana aroused in Miss Faloon's breast a fanatic determination to prevent it at whatever cost. This nerved her marvellously, and much to Robert's satisfaction she seemed to gather courage as the danger increased. By a wonderful effort of will in one so old and naturally timid she plucked up spirit and displayed a brave bearing in order to allay Lily's fears, which could hardly have been greater had she known that she was the contemplated victim and the cause of their perilous situation.

As for his own personal danger, about which Tom Bobus had warned him, Robert gave it no thought beyond taking care always to have his revolver handy night and day. He was satisfied nothing would be attempted against him until the week of mourning was over, provided he did not leave the ladies' apartments. What might be premeditated against him later on he left for future consideration. Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof. For the present his duty was to cheer and encourage Miss Faloon and Lily, and to be ready at an instant's notice to aid their escape. Everything would depend upon his exertions when the time came, and his mind was filled with anxiety, first as to whether Tom Bobus would be successful in gaining the Ranee Dewali's assistance, and secondly as to how Robert would accomplish the difficult details of the flight.

It was when Lily questioned him, as she often did, that Robert found himself hard pushed. He hated the idea of deceiving her, and yet it was necessary to do so. She had not the slightest suspicion of the terrible danger in which she was placed,

and her instinctive horror and detestation of the Rajah made it all the more urgent to keep the truth from her.

"Mr. Bolt," she asked him, "What is happening? Why do you never go out, and always carry your revolver about with you? Why will not Auntie let me undress at night? What does it all mean?"

"We are going to leave Ramjugger," he told her, "and shall start one night. You know the journey of the desert is always made at night. The date is undecided; it is best to be ready."

"But won't that horrid man give us proper notice? He has no right to behave like this. Uncle said we should be treated with such respect, and have everything we wanted. And now we are shut up here like prisoners, and may not even go out for a walk!"

"It won't be for long," Robert tried to put her off.

She searched his face, and then, "I am sure you are hiding something from me, Mr. Bolt," she cried. "It is not kind of you. You keep me in a state of curiosity, and I hate that! Why don't you tell me? Please do. If it's a secret I'll promise not to tell anybody!" She raised her hands in pretty appeal, and looked enquiringly and coaxingly into his eyes. And as he saw her innocent, girlish face, her *petite* grace, her pouting mouth, and all her fragile beauty, he cursed the dead scoundrel who would have sold her to the foul and debauched villain in whose power they were.

"Won't you tell me? Won't you trust me?" she repeated.

He took her in his arms, and, bending down, kissed her on the forehead. "Little sister," he asked her, "do you remember the night I told you to jump from the taffrail of the *Humber Maid*?"

She shuddered. "Oh, yes, yes. But I jumped!"

"I did not tell you why. You asked no questions, but you obeyed me."

"I always obey you," she reminded him.

"I want you to obey me now. Not to ask questions. To be ready to do exactly as I tell you, even though you may not understand the reason why. To trust me. Can you trust me enough for that?"

"Trust you!" cried Lily, reproachfully; "Do you think it is necessary to ask me that?"

"Then do as I tell you, little sister. Remember we have a long and fatiguing journey before us. Your poor Aunt is dreading it. Show me how brave and helpful you can be. Help me, dear, as you did in the boat, when you were my chief mate. Do you remember how the passengers on the steamer which rescued us christened you my 'Chief Mate'?"

Remember! I'd like to be your chief mate always, Mr. Bolt!" answered Lily, artlessly.

"Then I make you my chief mate in this adventure," he told her brightly. "And we must have naval discipline. No questions, but alacrity in obeying. Promise me that."

"I promise," said Lily.

"Thank you, dear," he said, in a tender, protective tone, patting her shoulder. "We shall have all our work cut out, Lily—you and I—to make matters easy for your poor Aunt."

For, if the opportunity came for escape, it was about Miss Faloon that Robert was most exercised. Lily was young and strong, and she might be depended upon for a long camel ride, for she had plenty of courage; but the prospect of the poor old lady astride of a *sowari* camel—for the fleetest class of animals were all provided with saddles, not litters—filled Robert with misgivings. Physically Miss Faloon was very frail and quite unfitted for exertion,

and Robert felt that his troubles would begin when they started. Although Miss Faloon bore up under their present trials with a wonderful spirit and determination, it was by the exercise of her will, and it would not have surprised him to see her break down at any moment. Oftentimes when she thought she was unobserved, Robert would catch a glimpse of her gazing at Lily with affectionate but frightened eyes, and there was a manifest effort in every thing she did. She could not sleep, and her appetite was gone; all the nourishment she could bring herself to take was a little fruit and milk. She had taken a fancy to custard apples, a fruit which Lily, singularly enough, did not like, and these were the only things she ate with any relish.

Slowly the four days and nights passed away. No news reached them, and the servants came and went with their stony faces, as dumb as mutes at a funeral. Robert's nerves were strung to the utmost; all through the day he reconnoitred from their balcony, trying to gather from the behaviour of the people in sight what was happening. Every night he stole out, lowered the rope over the wall, and waited till nearly daybreak in the hope that Tom Bobus might come. Terrible fears assailed his mind; had the ex-jockey turned false? Would he fail him? Had he been discovered and settled? They "settled" difficulties summarily in Ramjugger. On the third day he gave the *bheestie* another note to convey to Tom Bobus, but on this occasion the man made signs that he could not deliver it, and handed the note back. It was an ominous sign, and Robert was filled with fear Tom had been discovered.

At length the week of reprieve was over, and the morning of the eighth day was heralded with the booming of cannon firing salutes, and the tom-toming of innumerable native drums. The servants

who attended them turned out in new and resplendent liveries and turbans; a crowd clothed in brightest garments of red and pink gathered on the parade ground; flags were run up above the Rajah's Palace, and bands were heard playing all over the city. The season of mourning was over, and the day of rejoicing had arrived. The news was formally proclaimed that His Highness was about to marry another wife, and that the nuptials would be celebrated on the third day.

At noon the Rajah sent Hurry Lal to announce his intention of calling upon Miss Faloon and Lily in the afternoon. He desired a private interview, and by way of propitiation he sent the presents customary on such occasions in the East. There were trays full of sweets, flowers and rice; boxes containing female apparel of the most costly description; and several valuable jewels with which the Rajah desired pretty Mees would decorate herself.

Robert, anxious to spare Miss Faloon as much as was possible, proposed that he should receive the Rajah and attempt to reason with him, but the old lady, plucking up a wonderful spirit, declared her intention of meeting him. With the knowledge that the week of reprieve was ended, and that Tom Bobus had failed to make the arrangement for their flight, it was clear that a crisis had come. Peril and despair will sometimes inspire the most helpless creatures with inexplicable courage, and so it was with Miss Faloon, who now determined to beard the Rajah to his face.

"This is my duty," she declared to Robert. "Lily is my child. You are a stranger, dear Mr. Bolt, though you have been the noblest, truest friend in the world. When the Rajah comes I want you to take care of Lily, for I am determined he shall never see her. He thinks we are in his power. I am going

to undeceive him. Lily shall never be in his power—if you will help me."

"How can I help you?" asked Robert in great surprise.

"There is only one way," said Miss Faloon, solemnly. "I have thought it all over. I am convinced that force is intended. If the worst comes to the worst, Mr. Bolt, you have a pistol—you must shoot my child!"

Robert started back in horror. "My God," he cried, "don't tell me it has come to that yet!"

"Who knows? We must be prepared. Suppose—suppose by some sudden treachery they overpowered you? What could I do? Lily would be taken to the Women's Palace, and then"—the poor old lady clenched her hands together, and looked him earnestly in the face. "You see the necessity. Better, better a thousand times death than that! It will be a mercy. You must shoot her," she reiterated, firmly, "Innocent, pure child, she must never know—she must never dream of this horror. Promise me as you hope for salvation and mercy that you will show my child this—mercy!"

Robert had contemplated much, but never this. It was a terrible proposal, and it staggered him. "How can I do it?" he groaned, under his breath.

"Would you see her sacrificed to that monster? Could you endure to imagine what her feelings would be? Oh, promise me, promise me, Robert," she cried appealingly, and caught his hands in her extremity, "promise me to save her from what is worse than death. To show her the true mercy."

Had she been pleading for her life she could not have put more pathos into her prayer, or more intense earnestness. She hung upon his reply, and when at last, with bowed head and a face as white and drawn as hers, he gave her his promise,

"God bless you," she cried, with trembling fervour. "This is what has been troubling me. I can face death or torture now. I know I can trust you, and that my Lily will be spared the worst. Do not let her know; do it when she is not looking. You understand?"

Again he bowed his head, and the brave old woman drew his face down, and kissed him solemnly on his brow. "God will reward you for this mercy shown to my child," she whispered. "And now I am ready to see the Rajah, and defy him!"

And so it came to pass, when the Rajah was announced, Robert retired to Miss Faloon's room with Lily, and the elder lady braced herself to meet His Highness. Lily, with amazement and frightened perplexity in her blue eyes, gazed enquiringly into Robert's face as she saw him shut and lock the door of her aunt's room.

"Little sister," he said to her, "remember your promise. Trust me. Your aunt is arranging for our departure."

Half an hour passed, and then there came a knock at the door, and, to Robert's infinite relief, he heard Miss Faloon's voice calling on him to open it. She beckoned him out alone.

"Victory!" she cried, pale and trembling, as she tottered to the couch with faltering steps and sank down upon it. "I have obtained from him leave for us to go!"

"For us to go?" echoed Robert, scarce daring to believe such incredible news.

"Yes. To-morrow evening. I have compelled —frightened him into giving way. I am only an old spinster," she smiled through her tears, "but I have a woman's wit."

"How did you manage it?" he asked.

"I was determined not to show any fear, so I

faced him boldly, and asked him why he had come again to see me, and how he dared to prevent us from going. He said things had changed since the last time he was here ; that the Ranee Rosalie was dead, and there was nothing now to prevent his marrying Lily. ' You villain,' I cried, ' you have four black wives ! How dare you think of marrying an English one ? You would be put in prison in my country for what you have done.' He looked at me in great surprise, and then replied, ' Pho ! Pho ! Only English wife count. Native wife make no difference. I marry pretty Mees, and make native wives her slaves.' At that I shook my fist in his face, in my indignation, and told him I would see her dead before I allowed her to marry him. That, if poor Rosalie had been alive, I would have taken her away from him. And that I believed he had murdered her."

" Were you prudent to tell him that ?" asked Robert, in alarm.

" Prudent or imprudent, it had a marvellous effect on him. He protested very volubly, saying he had sent me the medical certificate of Rosalie's death, and that his doctor was prepared to swear to the cause of it. By degrees he worked himself up into a passion, and declared that I must keep the agreement under which he had advanced the money to bring Lily and me out from England. There was no obstacle now in the way of the marriage, and he had announced it to his subjects. The city was looking forward to his wedding with immense excitement, expecting the presents which it was customary to distribute on such occasions ; and that, if the populace was disappointed, there would be a rising, and we should all be killed. It was an unheard-of insult, he said, for a Rajpoot Rajah to be denied the bride he had selected ; and his people

would consider it as such, and visit their vengeance on us. On the other hand, if I consented, and the marriage was carried out, he promised me the same salary that my brother had enjoyed, and a present of fifty thousand rupees for my good services. The wretch seemed to think it was all a matter of bargaining, and that it was the money I was thinking about!"

"And what did you do?" asked Robert, breathlessly.

"I played my trump card; and that was *you*!"

"Me! Your trump card? What do you mean?"

"I said we might be massacred, but he would hang for it. And I told him—may I be forgiven the lie!—that you were related to the Viceroy's private secretary, and had written before starting for Ram-jugger, to tell him of your trip here. 'And now,' I cried, 'kill us at your peril! Let your populace break into this building and try to carry off Lily, as you threaten! You will be foiled, for Mr. Bolt will shoot her at the first symptom of danger. She shall never be yours, you wretch!'"

"You wonderful woman," cried Robert, in admiration.

"'What! What!' he cried. 'Gentleman shoot pretty Mees?' he exclaimed, incredulously. 'Oh, no! Never! Never!' Mr. Bolt is in my room, I told him, with a loaded pistol, ready to do so directly I give a signal. 'No, no,' he cried. 'No kill pretty Mees. You go. I give camel, give escort. To-morrow night I send you away all safe. I see all made mistake. I thought you only want more money. People in my country try get plenty money for their daughters. To-morrow night you go. Everything make ready. I swear!' And, with the profoundest salutation, he stalked out of the room!"

"There is nothing more wonderful than a woman's wit," said Robert, "unless it be a woman's love."

"The love of the young—the wit of the old," said Miss Faloon, and looked kindly at Robert. "If you had not made me that promise about Lily, I should never have had the courage to act as I did. Lily will never know what you have done, but——" she broke off, with a little choke, "I thank God you loved my little Lily enough to make that promise. If anything happens to me, Robert, you will always love and protect her, will you not?"

"I will always love and protect her," promised Robert. "I will be a brother to her."

"Thank you," said the old lady, but said it sadly, and sighed as she remembered the name Lily murmured in her dreams.

They were quite cheerful that evening, for the oppression of danger was removed. Lily's gay spirits returned when she was told that arrangements had been made for their departure, and, for the first time since she had heard of her sister's death, she seemed almost happy. The servants were particularly attentive after the Rajah left, and the *khansamah* made many enquiries as to what the Sahibs would like to have prepared for the morrow's journey. And, before retiring, he asked what fruit each of them would like for their early breakfast, which was always served in trays in their bedrooms. It seemed, in short, as though he could not do too much for their comfort, and he took especial pains to point out that the Rajah himself had condescended to give orders that their smallest wish should be ascertained and obeyed.

"What a difference!" observed Miss Faloon, as she said good night. "My threat about the Viceroy has evidently been effective. It is clear the Rajah has come to his senses."

Notwithstanding this happy turn in affairs, Robert did not omit to watch for Tom Bobus, in case he should have some communication to make, and he lowered the rope over the wall as usual. But the ex-jockey did not turn up, and, at three in the morning, Robert retired to his bed and fell into a deep sleep, his mind released from care. He had been dreaming much of late, under pressure of brain-tension and excitement—hideous nightmare dreams. But this morning his visions were sweet and pleasant. So much so that, when the servant called him at six o'clock, he found him still asleep; and, although he roused him, Robert allowed himself to indulge in another nap.

From this he was awakened with a start; screams ringing in his ears, and hands dragging at him. For a moment he thought he was being assailed by the servants; but the next he recognised Lily, who seemed frantic with fear, and was imploring him to come to her aunt, who was taken ill. He leapt out of bed, and followed her to their bedroom, where he found Miss Faloon writhing on the floor in agony.

On the table by the side of her bed stood her morning tea and fruit. On the plate was a half-eaten custard-apple. And it passed through Robert's mind in a flash that his own early breakfast, which he had not tasted, also consisted of a custard-apple, as he had noted in his hurried exit from his own room.

CHAPTER XVI.

FIGHT AND FLIGHT !

THE next instant, as if by magic, the faces of a dozen servants were peering through the doorway.

Send for Doctor sahib, send for doctor sahib," they cried in a singularly ready and unanimous chorus, whilst one of them hurriedly cleared away the tea cups and fruit plates and disappeared.

Robert lifted the frail form of Miss Faloon on to her bed. She was speechless, her limbs contracted in agony, and quivering convulsively. His instinct grasped the situation; Miss Faloon had been poisoned, and the custard apple, with its creamy, sweet juice had been the vehicle for the poison.

"The medicine chest," he cried to Lily. Trembling from head to foot she brought it, and at a sign from him took his place by her Aunt's side. He searched for an emetic, found one, poured out a strong dose, and with Lily's assistance administered it. It was with the greatest difficulty they could force it down the poor woman's throat, for she was rigid now, and her teeth clenched in a sort of lock-jaw. Her staring eyes looked at him and Lily in an awful fixed gaze. A purple hue was stealing over her lips, and her hands began to twitch convulsively. She tried to speak, but the power of her tongue was gone, and she could only gaze at them with a pathetic and despairing expression on her tortured features.

In a few minutes her eyes began to glaze, and she lost her feeble sense of consciousness. Lily was kneeling by her side, kissing the thin, delicate hands and imploring her to speak. The girl's grief was harrowing, and almost unmanned Robert, who saw that the moment of dissolution could not be long deferred. To add to the distress of the scene the native servants still lingered in the chamber, and when Robert waved his hand to them to leave they held their ground.

There was something in their manner that aroused his suspicions, and all of a sudden he remembered that he was unarmed, having left his revolver under his pillow. At the same moment there flashed upon him the certainty that this was a carefully arranged plot to poison himself and Miss Faloon, so that the Rajah might get Lily into his power. To regain his revolver was now of the most urgent necessity. The servants were grouped about the door, probably to impede his egress. He was caught in a trap unless he could break through them. Time to consider or deliberate there was none. With a sudden bound he flung himself upon the group, hitting out right and left, and felling three to the ground. In the commotion that ensued he whipped round into his own room; there, true enough, were a couple more of the men, searching for the revolver without doubt. At sight of him they gave an alarmed cry, and attempted to leave the room, but a couple of well-directed blows sent them staggering into the corner, and Robert took advantage of their dismay to possess himself of his weapon, which luckily they had not discovered. Then he ran back to Lily's room, who had missed him and was crying out for him. He had just time to reach and reassure her, when the native doctor was announced.

He was a caste-brother of Hurry Lal, a tall

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thin, cadaverous-looking man. There was a nervous agitation in his manner as he approached and peeped at Miss Faloon. Without any attempt at diagnosis or examination he gabbled out what was evidently a prearranged opinion :

“Lady dying from bad attack of cholera ! ”

“Dying,” shrieked Lily, “Oh, Auntie, Auntie, don’t leave me ! Oh, Auntie, Auntie”—and in a hysterical tumult she flung herself upon the bed by Miss Faloon’s side, and sobbed.

“Take Mees sahib away,” said the doctor. “This very bad case. She catchee cholera. Then what Rajah sahib say ? ”

By some mysterious means two women appeared.

“Rajah sahib hear lady ill and send women to nurse,” explained the doctor. “They take care of Mees sahib. She must no stop in this house, or she catchee cholera, too.”

The women approached Lily with fawning gestures, inviting her to retire with them, and tried to lift her up. It was a critical moment ; the native servants had again clustered around the door, with sullen, angry looks directed at Robert. Strange faces peered from over their shoulders of men who had arrived in attendance on the doctor. Against the gathering numbers Robert could not hope to prevail, even if he shot half-a-dozen of them. He remembered his promise to Miss Faloon, and for a moment the impulse came to him to carry it into effect. He looked at Lily, and even as he did so, there was a last, convulsive movement of the poor sufferer, and the doctor announced, “Lady dead ! ”

The moment had come when Robert must act. The two women were fumbling at Lily, who clung to her Aunt’s body. The servants came forward with obvious intention in their mien. Robert drew his pistol and levelled it at them, and they fell back

a few paces. Then he grabbed the doctor by his arm, and pointing the weapon at his head—

“Out with all these men this instant, or you are a dead man,” he cried. “Clear the room; quick, quick, give the orders or I will scatter your brains,” and he pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver against the doctor’s temple.

The man stiffened with fear, and attempted to draw back; but Robert held him firmly, and punctuated his order with a sharp rap on his head. “Give the orders,” he repeated.

His teeth chattering with fear, the doctor gave some orders in the native tongue, but the sullen attendants seemed in no mood to obey. Shifting his hand from the doctor’s arm to his neck for a better grip, Robert turned his pistol on the crowd, and fired. One man gave a scream, and fell back, whilst the others rushed to the door of the big room in a sudden panic. Loosening his hold on the doctor, Robert followed up his advantage, and by a dramatic display of threats drove the crowd from the room, and shutting the heavy doors after them, shot the bolt. Then he rushed back to Lily, lifted her in his arms, and bore her to his own room, where he laid her on his bed. “Stay here,” he whispered, “Your life depends on it.”

Back to the big room just in time to prevent the doctor from escaping. He had him in his clutches in a second, and hurled him to the further end. Meanwhile the man he had shot lay moaning and bleeding on the floor.

“Oh, sir,” cried the doctor, clasping his lean hands, “let me go. Why master shoot? I come cure poor lady. Let me go.”

And now, with a moment’s breathing space to consider, Robert felt overwhelmed with the situation he had created. He had placed himself in the wrong

by the first act of violence which invited violence from the other side. It was a declaration of open war for which he alone was responsible. He turned to the doctor:

"Attend to that man," he commanded him, pointing to the wounded native.

The doctor approached and knelt down by his side. The shot had taken effect in the shoulder, and though painful was not dangerous. He took off the man's turban, and bound up the wound, and made him rise to his feet, which he was quite capable of doing.

"I take him to hospital," he said humbly to Robert.

"No," said Robert, with some idea of detaining the doctor as a hostage, "I am going to keep you here."

"Oh, sir, no. Must go. Must draw certificate for Rajah sahib. Must give information. Plenty preparations to make for burning the lady."

"Silence," cried Robert, "the lady will be buried to-morrow. I will not consent to her being burnt."

The doctor threw up his hands in alarm. "Sir, sir, must burn quick. No Hindoo eat in city till lady burnt. That Hindoo custom. Cannot keep body all night." He shuddered, and added, "Ghost come and frighten all people. Hindoo very 'fraid of ghost!"

He was speaking the simple truth. Cremation follows death within two or three hours in India. A corpse is an unclean thing, and whilst one lies in a building no one may eat. Moreover a murdered corpse—and none knew better than the doctor that Miss Faloon had been murdered—is supernaturally dreaded, and to allow the poor lady's to remain in the Palace until the morning was enough to create a

public panic. Robert did not know this, but the doctor's evident perturbation gave him an inkling, and he determined to profit by it to the extent of gaining a little delay.

"The first man that attempts to enter this room will be shot dead," he said. "I shall not permit the lady's body to be touched by black hands. A coffin must be made and brought here to-morrow. Go and tell the Rajah that."

"Sir, sir, please think," protested the doctor. "All Palace fast if lady not burnt. Sucking mothers no nurse their babies! The Rajah sahib not able to eat! And then all people too much 'fraid of ghost! You no understand, sir. Hindoo must keep caste and custom. This very frightful thing master want do!"

The doctor's manifest agitation suggested an idea to Robert. "We English people believe in ghosts, too," he said. "When anybody is murdered his or her ghost appears. If Miss Faloon's ghost is seen, then it will be a sure proof that she has been murdered," he added, impressively.

At this confirmation of his own dread, supernatural fears, the doctor's face assumed a horrified expression. He glanced timorously at the door of the room in which Miss Faloon's body lay as though expecting to see her apparition issue forth and denounce him. Following the direction of his eyes, and possibly possessed of some knowledge of English, the native who had been wounded rose from the chair into which he had sunk, and moved towards the door. At the same moment there came a cry from Lily in Robert's room to remind him that she needed his comfort and support. He realised that nothing was to be gained by keeping the doctor as a hostage, and decided to let him depart with the wounded man. Covering them with his revolver he

cautiously opened the door, and permitted them to leave, which they did with alacrity, and he shut and bolted the door securely again.

Then he went in to Lily, and seating himself by the side of the bed on which she lay weeping, attempted to solace her, begging her to bear up, for the time had now come when they must depend on their own exertions if escape was to be permitted them.

It was a long time before he could still the hysterical grief which distracted her. She had been terrified by the report of the revolver and the sight of the wounded man, followed by the scuffle when Robert cleared the room. Without knowing what threatened she was fully aware that they were in great danger, and she clung to Robert as he sat by her bedside, begging him not to desert her. It was with the greatest difficulty that he soothed her into a condition to listen to what he had to say, and when at last she had stifled her sobs, and regained her composure in a measure, he told her that their only chance lay in flight, and if they could only manage to hold out until it was dark, it was his intention to let her down over the rampart, and seek refuge in the desert.

“ You must help me, Lily,” he said; “ you must remember you have promised to be my little chief mate, dear. We must make preparations. And we must keep watch against being surprised. I want you to be as brave to-night as you were that night in the boat.”

She looked up at him with her blue, tear-laden eyes in a way that wrung his heart, and told him, with a great effort to control her grief, that she would try. The first thing to be done was for her to dress herself, for she was still in her dressing-gown. She wished to go into her own room to do so, but he

would not permit this, desiring to spare her the shock of seeing her Aunt again. So he went himself, and after reverently drawing a sheet over the face of the dead woman, collected Lily's clothes and brought them to her in his room, and whilst she was donning them took precautions to safeguard themselves from a forcible entry.

Fortunately there was only one entrance into the suite of apartments they occupied. The door was a massive one, but Robert thought it prudent to barricade it, and he set the dining table on end against it, and strengthened it with all the heavy furniture he could collect. Scarcely had he finished doing this than there came a summons from without, and he heard Hurry Lal's voice.

He demanded to be told what he wanted, and the Baboo replied that he had been sent by the Rajah to say that the man Robert had wounded was dead, and that, if he did not surrender himself, the Rajah would have him arrested by force. Robert was perfectly satisfied that the man was not dead, for he had seen the wound. The one thing he desired was to gain time; and he replied that, as soon as Miss Faloon had been buried on the morrow, he would give himself up, but that nothing would induce him to do so until he had accorded her funeral rites.

To this the Baboo answered that all the arrangements had been made for the cremation of Miss Faloon, and that it was absolutely necessary that she should be burnt that afternoon. He had brought the corpse-carriers to bear the body away, and he demanded in the name of the Rajah that the door should be opened, or it should be forced. Whereupon Robert declared he would shoot the first man who attempted to enter, and declined any more parley.

After vainly endeavouring to argue the matter, and failing to get any further reply from Robert, the Baboo retired to report to the Rajah. Presently he was back again, this time with a promise to let Robert depart unmolested if he would give up Lily and allow the remains of Miss Faloon to be carried out. To which Robert replied that nothing would induce him to open the door until the morrow, and then only on the solemn promise that he should be allowed to bury the dead, in the manner that was required by their religion; and that after that he would give up his revolver, and surrender himself, provided they would undertake to deport him to British territory. To this Hurry Lal would not agree, and his retort was to begin battering at the door with mallets and axes; in which extremity Robert sent Lily to his room, and closed the door so that she could not hear what he said, and then, summoning the Baboo to the door, swore to him in a low tone of voice that he would shoot Lily at the first sign of the door giving way.

"Go and tell the Rajah," he said. "He will know that it is true, and what Miss Faloon told him I had promised to do."

Again the Baboo retired, and was absent for two hours. When he returned, he informed Robert that he would be left in peace for the night, if he would promise not to harm Lily and allow Miss Faloon's corpse to be carried away. It was evident he was greatly perturbed, both by Robert's threat and by his failure to perform the cremation. Robert replied that he would promise nothing and agree to nothing, over and above what he had himself proposed, and absolutely declined any further negotiation. Several more attempts were made to get him to yield, but he preserved silence, and in the end the Baboo went away for further instructions.

By this time the afternoon was drawing to a close. Lily, worn out with fear and anxiety, had laid down on Robert's bed and fallen into a slumber. With sunset, Robert fancied he heard the departing feet of the guards who had been stationed at the door, and concluded that their superstitious horror prevented them from continuing their watch. Robert reconnoitred the parade-ground from the balcony, and saw that the crowd, which had been there since mid-day, was melting away. At sunset, the melancholy wails of the mourning horns—which the Hindoos always wind to scare away the spirits of the dead—seemed to redouble in energy. They had been sounding all the day. A little later, bodies of men began lighting fires on the parade-ground, and on the open space beneath their balcony, which was fortunately too high from the ground to be reached with a ladder. Round these fires the horn-blowers squatted, and blew prodigious blasts of the most painful and lugubrious music.

A couple of hours passed. Lily slept on. Not a soul had attempted to enter the apartments. A score of times Robert stole to the door and listened. All was silent, as though the particular Palace in which they were was deserted. Could it be possible, that these cowardly Hindoos were so scared by their fear of ghosts as to refuse to keep watch anywhere near where a corpse lay? It almost seemed like it, and a faint ray of hope came to Robert that they might reach the desert, even though the desert meant death. But, if the worst came, better there, under the sky, than inside these prison-walls.

At ten o'clock he awakened Lily. She was greatly refreshed by her long sleep. He told her that the time had come when she must nerve herself for the effort of her life, and that she must be as brave and unquestioning as she was that night they left

the *Humber Maid*. She caught his hand in the dark, and pressed it, to show that she understood. Then he completed their final arrangements, for they had water and food to carry with them, and it was necessary to dispose the weight about their persons conveniently.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, an explosion rent the air, and through the open door they saw a flame belch out into the sitting-room. The barricade Robert had erected was demolished and hurled across the room in splinters, and immediately afterwards a fusillade of bullets spat against the opposite wall. Then a loud shout arose, torches gleamed, and several forms were seen stumbling over the débris of the shattered barricade.

Robert rushed forward, revolver in hand, and discharged it into the mass of men, whose bodies he could see crowding the gap and silhouetted by the torches held in the rear. Two of the stormers fell forward at his feet, yelling in their death-agony. In the dim light he caught sight of the fat figure of Baboo Hurry Lal, who was in the rear, directing the attack. He took a hasty aim, and by a happy chance hit him. "I am killed! I am killed!" he heard him shout. There were but two charges left; there flashed across his mind that he ought to keep one for Lily and the other for himself. But it was too late; the men were pressing on him and through the wreck of the barricade. Crack! Crack! Two fell dead, for he had put the muzzle to their heads. At the same moment, he felt a sharp pain in his side. Someone had speared him; but the blade of the spear had merely penetrated the skin. By some miraculous means he managed to possess himself of the spear, and turned it on his assailants. A strength he had never been conscious of before, the strength

of despair, sustained him, and he set to work stabbing and prodding like a madman at the mass of faces and forms in front of him. And he had this advantage—that he could see them against the torchlight, whilst they were unable to see him.

But, even in this supreme moment, his one thought was for Lily. He had neglected to reserve a cartridge, to keep his word to Miss Faloon. There remained nothing but to stab her to death with the spear. It was a horrible thought; and yet it came to him as his duty.

“Lily! Lily!” he cried, intending to end it all, for there was a temporary lull in the assault.

There arose a piercing shriek behind him. It was Lily running forward in her white dress with her white arms held aloft. Before he could turn to execute his intention, there was a panic in front of him.

“*Booth! Booth!*” (ghost! ghost!) the frightened cry arose. Without understanding what it meant, Robert recognised the tone of abject fear in the cry. It was taken up by those behind the first line of assailants. Then, all of a sudden, the torches went out. There was a momentary hush, broken by the shrill, weird, piercing shrieks which Lily emitted. They were strange and terrifying to the native ear, and the next moment the patter of naked feet dying away in the distance assured Robert that his foes were stampeding in terror.

He flew to Lily, caught her in his arms, carried her to his room, and bolted the door. Then, by the back steps, to the rampart, where he had placed the rope ready; tied it round her, fastened the end to the staple that the *bheestie* used, lifted her over the wall, gave her one kiss, and lowered her. Slack! She had reached the ground.

And what was that?

There was a whistle. He had not told her to signal back, and marvelled at her presence of mind.

The next moment he was following her, hand over hand. As he reached the bottom, someone gripped him.

He raised his hand to strike, when the voice of Tom Bobus fell upon his ear, thanking Heaven he was in time!

CHAPTER XVII.

DERELICT IN THE DESERT.

TOM BOBUS wasted no words in explanation. "Follow me," he whispered, as he crouched low and led the way. And Robert, making Lily precede him, did as they were bid.

After progressing about two hundred yards, the forms of two camels squatting on the ground loomed suddenly in front of them. By this time the walls of the citadel had been lost in the black night, and all that remained to remind them of the Palace they had escaped from was the lugubrious blasts of the horns which were still sounding.

Tom Bobus came to a halt. "Listen," he said. "There is no time and I have much to tell. You must fly at once. No, no, sir; don't thank me. No time for thanks; every moment is precious. By great good fortune I obtained an interview with the Ranee Dewali. Miss Faloon's death has scared her. Whilst she was alive the Ranee thought Miss Willis was safe, and——"

"Hush," interrupted Robert, gripping Tom's arm, and bending forward whispered in his ear, "She knows nothing; she must not be alarmed."

Tom comprehended, but Lily, who was listening, turned a scared face to Robert. "What does he mean?" she asked.

"He means that the Ranee Dewali——"

"The *Ranee*? I thought Rosalie was the *Ranee*?"

"The old *Ranee*," put in Tom, with a quick wit. "She thought everything was arranged for your departure. But never mind that; I have no time to tell the story. She has sent you this, Miss Willis, with her salaam. It belonged to your sister; put it in your pocket safely," and he handed her a packet sewn up in silk and sealed, which Lily thrust into the bosom of her dress.

"And now," went on Tom, "you must start. The *Ranee* has arranged a plan which will enable you to get off without fear of being followed. The people of this country are wonderful trackers, and can follow the footprints of a camel for any distance, and carry the trail over sand and rock. I have therefore brought two camels. *Bijli* is for you; it is the fleetest camel in the stables, and can travel a hundred miles at a stretch. You must mount it, and ride into the river, and travel in the water, which is very shallow, for about three hours, so that all track of you may be lost. Meanwhile I shall lay a track in another direction on the other camel, and to more thoroughly deceive the trackers you must give me one or two small articles—a handkerchief, a glove—to drop as if by accident."

Lily gave him her handkerchief and gloves instantly, and Robert made over a cigar case, and Tom stowed them in his pocket.

"The river," he went on, "flows about ten miles due South, and then makes a sharp turn, under some sand hills, to the West. You should reach that point a little after midnight. Leave the river at the bend and strike away due East, across the desert. Look, do you see that star?" and he pointed to one behind them.

"That is the North star," said Lily quickly.

"Well done," said Tom. "That star must guide you. Keep it to your left. Mind, that in the direction you follow you have to turn your face over your left shoulder to see that star." He turned to the East, and illustrated the bearing of the star to the course they had to follow.

Robert nodded, and Tom went on. "Whatever you do, never let the camel make for the North. Bijli is pretty sure to do so if he is not directed, as he is certain to make for the half-way well by instinct. Men will be sent out first of all to search that route."

"I understand that thoroughly, Tom," said Robert.

"Sunrise will show you the true East, and up to ten o'clock you should have no difficulty in keeping the right direction. From ten to three you had better rest, and when the sun begins to decline its shadows will again supply you with a guide. So long as you keep to the East you must reach the railway."

There was something very encouraging in the eager, reliant words of the little ex-jockey, and in his confident manner and tone. "Thank you very, very much, Mr. Bobus," said Lily, and gave him her hand, "I shall never forget what you have done for us."

"Ah, Miss," cried Tom, overcome with her condescension, "I only wish I could accompany you, and see you safe to British territory. But it is more important that I should lay a false trail to deceive those who will be scouring the country for you as soon as day breaks. But by that time you will be safe if you carry out my directions."

"You may be sure we shall do that," said Robert, wringing the little ex-jockey's hand warmly. "You are a noble fellow, and I only wish I could think that some day it might be in my power to repay your great service. But how will you account for your absence?"

"Don't trouble about me, sir. The Ranee Dewali is just as anxious as you are for Miss Willis to get away from Ramjugger. She will see that no harm comes to me. I shall abandon my camel in the desert and get back by some other means. I am supposed to be ill in bed! And now, sir, please mount and be off."

Robert lifted Lily into the back seat of the saddle, and buckled a strap round her to keep her as secure as possible. Then he took his seat in front of her, and with one jerk of the rein brought Bijli to his feet.

"Don't leave the river bed," was Tom Bobus's last warning. "Keep on until you reach the bend to the West, and then strike out to the East. Remember the North star on your left shoulder. And the rising and the setting sun. Good-bye, Miss Willis! Good-bye, Mr. Bolt!" and with a last wave of his hand, and their thanks and blessings ringing in his ears, Tom preceded to mount the other camel and was soon lost to sight in the dark plain.

A whip was hanging at the saddle bow, and Robert gave Bijli a cut with it, and guided him into the middle of the river bed. The next minute, with a great, lolloping, splashing action he began to trot down the shallow bed of the stream, over which only a few inches of water flowed. After a few endeavours to make for the bank, Bijli seemed to understand what was required of him and very contentedly resigned himself to a paddle through the water.

The jolting motion of a *sowari*, that is, a trotting camel, is most uneasy to those riders who are not accustomed to it, and to anyone sitting sideways, as Lily was, to retain the seat is almost impossible. At the outset she had very nearly slipped off, but saved herself by catching Robert round the waist. This happened three or four times, and it was soon clear

that if they were to keep at a trot she must adopt the masculine manner of riding.

"Mr. Bolt," she was constrained to confess, "I can't go on like this. I must ride as you do!"

"I'm afraid you must," he said, and halted the camel, and without any fuss she tucked her skirt up, and sitting astride in the saddle, found the stirrups, and circled his waist with her arms.

"Go on," she whispered, "I shall not fall off now. I am so sorry to give you so much trouble."

"Trouble, dear!" he cried back to her. "Oh, if you only knew how much I admire your pluck and readiness to adapt yourself to circumstances! If you had been a stupid, shy, frightened, mock-modest girl—but there! I always knew you were a little heroine!"

"If I am that," she answered, "it is you who make me so. How could I do anything but try to give as little trouble as possible to you, who have risked everything for me? Dear Auntie told me the Rajah wanted you to go, and you wouldn't go because of us. That you insisted on stopping because—oh, I don't know why, but I am sure it was to save us from some dreadful danger, because Auntie began to cry. And now I understand; we would have been murdered. I owe my life to you. I should have been poisoned."

He did not answer, but he patted the little hands that were clasped in front of him, and felt her arms tightening round him in grateful response, and her warm breath at the back of his neck as she laid her head restfully upon his shoulder.

"Oh, you are good to me," she whispered, "you are good to me!"

The jolting motion and the splashing made by the camel rendered conversation impossible when he put the animal into a trot again, and they relapsed

into silence. By this time their eyes had become accustomed to the starlight and could gather in something of the scene around them. A weird scene! The sandy desert, faintly discernible, stretching into infinity; clumps of stunted bushes and tall grasses taking strange shapes and forms as they fringed the banks of the river; now and then a group of tall, ghostly date-palms waving their lofty, nodding tops with mysterious murmurs far above. Silhouetted against the sky, they bore a fanciful resemblance to funereal plumes. In the mirror of the river's surface beamed or twinkled the reflection of the myriad bright stars overhead. To Lily it seemed as though they were riding through stars—through the unknown, as a bird might wing its flight, only without its instinct to guide their way. They fascinated her, as she gazed down and saw them waver and melt away in the ripple caused by their passage. She almost forgot the dangers they were escaping from, for the night was cool and she had her arms round Robert and felt no fear, and only knew that she was riding away with him into the unknown and that he would care for her and protect her.

Presently, as they drew further away from Ramjugger, there were other sights and sounds to arrest her attention. A flight of flying foxes would come sailing through the welkin, with clatter of their vampire-wings, and circle round the camel like things of ill-omen. The skulking forms of jackals, and wolves drinking at the river, would lift their gaunt heads and then turn and trot away a little distance inland, and presently break out into a melancholy wail, or utter a series of short, shrill barks. Or there would be a startled scamper, and a herd of hyenas scurry off, making night hideous with their fiendish laugh. Awful enough is the

desert by day, with its sense of desolate isolation ; but not till night does it reveal its full mystery, in sombre shadows and uncanny sounds. Then it becomes a haunted place.

In the excitement of their escape, Robert had taken no heed of his wound. Of a truth, it was but a slight gash—one that would have healed with a week's rest on a bed and a little caution in moving. But it was so situated, in the crease of his side, that the place was peculiarly susceptible to the jolting motion of the camel. As a fact, every jerk—and camel-riding is a series of jerks—increased the wound, which soon began to bleed, without, however, Robert being aware of it. He pressed his hand to his side, to try and ease the pain, but without effect. At last it became so intolerable that he was obliged to reduce Bijli to a walk and make some excuse to Lily that he wanted to readjust his pockets, which were filled with a miscellaneous assortment of things. He managed to bind a handkerchief tightly round his waist, without exciting her suspicion as to the reason necessitating it, and felt a little temporary relief.

On again, splashing and jolting down the river-bed. Bijli trotted out bravely and the miles slipped by. It was evident that Lily was feeling great fatigue, for her hands clasped round Robert's waist gripped firmer and she bore more heavily on his back. But never a word escaped her, though she would have given much to have called a halt. There is a dreadful monotony in this method of travelling, and it seemed to both of them that they must have been in motion for hours. The country grew wilder-looking than ever and they came into a region of stunted thorn-bushes and sandhills. Tom Bobus had told them that the bend in the river was under a sandhill, and Robert hoped they would reach it at

any moment. At last, when his patience was almost exhausted, a sandhill taller than ordinary rose up right in front of them, and the river bore away sharply to the right; and Robert knew they had arrived at the place where their course had to be changed.

"Here we are, Lily," he said, thankfully. "And now, dear, if you don't mind, we'll rest a little."

"I shall be thankful," said Lily, "for I feel all shaken to pieces!"

Robert guided the camel to land, and made it squat down, and, not without pain, he slid off and assisted Lily to alight. Tying Bijli to a bush they went to the river's brink, enjoyed a good drink of water, and ate some biscuits, and filled up the water-bottles attached to their saddle. Then, making some excuse, Robert wandered off a little way, unloosened the *putti* from his right leg and bound it round and round his waist, padding his wound with a folded handkerchief soaked in water. It afforded him considerable relief, and he hoped it might enable him to get through the long ride that was in front of them.

Returning to Lily, he spoke a few cheering words to her, and praised her brave spirit.

"Little sister," he told her, "you are a true daughter of the desert. I never saw a girl like you, dear. You amaze me with the way you keep up."

She glanced up at him, happiness in her face at winning his praise.

"I am not a bit frightened of the desert when I am with you," she declared, naïvely. "If I could only forget all the misery and terror of the last week, I should quite enjoy the adventure. But oh, Mr. Bolt, what would poor auntie have done, if she had been spared to accompany us?"

They mounted Bijli again, set their course by the North Star, and plunged into the trackless

desert. The slight rest and refreshment had done them both good, and, their progress now being over the silent sand, Robert was able to interject scraps of conversation over his shoulder, and Lily to answer him. A trivial thing ; but in the dark, lonely desert, the sound of human speech is very comforting and, coming from the lips that she loved, it filled Lily with happiness. He was so kind and thoughtful for her comfort, checking the camel into a walk, from time to time, to give her a little ease—and, if the truth must be known, to gain some for himself, for he was beginning to suffer much pain again. And his hand folded over hers, which were clasped round his waist, gave her a feeling of tender protection, as she thankfully rested her tired head and body against his back, and vowed she could almost fall asleep.

Three hours passed, which Robert reckoned had taken them fifteen miles from the river. The bitter chill that precedes dawn came on, and the last hour of the night, which is accounted the darkest. Bijli showed a little sluggishness, as camels often do when it is cold. Once it stumbled badly, and the jerk disarranged Robert's bandage and caused him acute pain, which increased as the edge or a wrinkle in the handkerchief began to rub and irritate his wounded side, It required the exercise of all his fortitude to control himself from crying out. He dared not tell Lily, for if she knew that he was injured, and thought he was in pain, she would certainly insist on stopping. Her love and concern for him were far too apparent for Robert to give her any opportunity of practically expressing them. They must push on—push on to the rising sun. The desert by day, in the scorching heat, was far more to be dreaded than the desert by night, and it would be necessary for him to extemporise some

shelter. Although he felt they were pretty safe from pursuit, he was still far from easy in his mind. They would have to halt for four or five hours, but it must be at a sufficient distance from Ramjugger to ensure that they were not overtaken. The pain and fatigue he was now suffering exerted an influence on his own spirits, and dulled them. Dangers that were, perhaps, more imaginary than real, loomed in his mind. He was haunted with thoughts of Ramjugger and the Rajah, and the terrible peril Lily had escaped from, and he could not feel assured of her safety until they reached British territory. The horrors of that Women's Palace—worse than any prison—to which Lily had been doomed rose before his vision, and oppressed him. He shuddered at the sacrifice that had been designed, of this innocent, sweet child, whose arms were clinging round him and pressing him to her bosom. There must be no stopping! And so, he clenched his teeth, resolved to triumph over the physical pain that racked him—clenched his teeth, and gripped his whip, and goaded Bijli on.

Again the camel stumbled, with its accompaniment of torture for him. At this he lost his temper, and, for a relief to his feelings, plied the whip impatiently, and more often than was needful, or Bijli accustomed to. It was done almost unconsciously, but it had the effect of rousing Bijli's evil temper. With an angry grunt and uncouth noises, the camel demurred to the punishment and, elevating its head in the air, shambled along at an increased pace.

Suddenly, in the dark, it got its foot entangled in the skeleton of some dead animal and nearly came down. Robert raised his whip to strike, and the camel, now really affrighted, gave a start, stumbled again, dragging at the rein, and in doing

so jerked Robert on to its neck, from whence he fell to the ground under an insufferable spasm of pain.

Before he could rise to his feet and seize the rein, which he made a superhuman effort to do, Bijli was bolting into the black desert, with Lily on his back and the rein trailing on the ground.

Robert gave a cry of alarm, and bounded forward to follow. As he did so, a stabbing pain seemed to shoot through his side and paralyse him. He staggered a few steps, halted, reeled, and fell to the ground. And, as his senses passed from him, the last sound he heard was Lily's shrieks lessening in the distance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DESPERATE PLIGHT.

MORNING broke over the desert. The sun rose and shone upon Robert's recumbent figure lying motionless at the foot of a sand hillock. Presently he moved, tossed his arms and swayed his head from side to side. His numbed blood began to circulate through his veins as consciousness returned. He opened his eyes ; they fell upon the skeleton of a camel, its widespread ribs half-buried, like a wreck, in the sand.

With a shudder, he turned his eyes away from the sinister object and looked up at the hard blue sky. What were those birds circling above him ? Slowly circling and descending ? He recognised them, having become familiar with vultures at Ramjugger, and he knew they were collecting for him !

He looked towards the east, where the haze-enveloped sun gleamed dully like a ball of molten lead suspended in the sky. He knew and dreaded its mid-day power. A sense of horror and despair crept over him. His helplessness, his isolation, the grinning skeleton, the circling vultures, with their faint, shrill whistles to one another, and the round-eyed, pitiless sun !

But more terrible than the anticipation of his own impending tortures was the thought of Lily. Where was she ? Had that cursed animal carried

her back to Ramjugger? Its natural instinct, when left without control, would be to return to its stable. If it had, Lily would now be in the Women's Palace!

Then came a ray of hope. She might have thrown herself from Bijli's back when he slackened speed, and, if so, could not be far off. A drop from the saddle on to the soft sand would certainly not have daunted her. If he could only manage to crawl to the top of the sand-hillock under which he lay! Nerving himself, he made the attempt. But movement was beyond his physical power; the pain in his inflamed side gripped him like a pair of red-hot pincers and compelled him to desist.

He fell back, and lay, helpless and hopeless. The action of the wind had scooped out a small dip in the surface of the sand at the base of the hillock, so that he could not see the horizon, and it seemed to him that he was lying in a shallow grave, cut off from the world. Every moment the sun gathered strength, a dreadful thirst tortured him, and myriads of sand-flies began to torment.

He felt that his dark hour had come—that death could only be a matter of a few hours. His thoughts wandered back to the events of the past few weeks, and the panorama of his adventures passed before his mind with inexorable exactitude, omitting nothing. From that tragic night when Edith and his brother had bidden him farewell, as he started on his flight, through the mazy course of his doublings and wanderings, until now, when he was lost in a region more remote than any he had contemplated or coveted. There was a grim irony in his present circumstances; he had reached and over-reached that vanishing-point which he sought. No one would ever find him. The vultures would take good care of that, and the desert wind and sand would foil his track for ever.

It was an awful thought—this lonely death in the desert ; and, as he pondered it, there came to him an inexpressible longing to leave some written record behind him, even as a mariner on a sinking ship commits a bottle with a message in it to the waves, trusting to Providence to carry it to a destination. He felt he must leave some written words to reveal Lily's fate. For he knew full well that, once in the Rajah's power, no news of her would be allowed to reach the outer world.

In his pocket was his notebook ; with feeble fingers he drew it out, reflected for a few moments, and wrote as follows :

"To any Englishman by whom these words may come to be read—in the name of Heaven and humanity, HELP AND SPEED !

"An English girl, named Lilian Willis, whose sister married the Rajah of Ramjugger, is now in his power. He enticed her to his Court by false pretences, in order that he might make her an inmate of his zenana. He poisoned her aunt, because she would not consent to her niece marrying him, and then attempted to kidnap Lilian by force. I managed to extricate her, and we escaped from Ramjugger by night on a camel, hoping to cross the desert and reach British territory. Unfortunately I was wounded, and fell from the camel, which has probably carried Lilian back to Ramjugger. If this is the case, she is in the Rajah's zenana, and her fate is too horrible to think of. She has no knowledge or suspicion of what was intended. I lie here, in the desert, unable to move, and my death can only be a matter of a few hours. For Heaven's sake, haste to her rescue. She is but a child in years and innocence. May Heaven be merciful to her !

"HELP AND SPEED !

"Robert Bolt."

As he signed the name he had adopted there came to him the memory of Edith, and he felt he must leave some message for her, too. She had passed out of his life more completely than he had suspected since he had come to love Lily. But there was a time when Edith had absorbed all the love of which he was capable, and crystallised everything that was dearest in womankind for him. But having once realised and accepted the final nature of the barrier between them, and been thrown into such intimate companionship with Lily, his feelings had undergone a change. When he left Edith, he knew it was for good; he had admitted the finality it involved. And, since he could never marry Edith, why might he not think of Lily?

Moreover, Edith and his brother had both promised to write to him at Bombay and had not done so. Their neglect had been a cruel shock; it seemed as though Edith had forgotten him. Notwithstanding, at this solemn moment, when he was taking farewell of the world—as he believed—his heart softened, and a wave of the old affection returned. So he turned to the next page of his notebook, and set down these words: “A dying man asks anyone, into whose hands this book may fall, to tear this page out, and forward it to Miss Edith Carew at the address given.” Then he wrote underneath:

“Dearest Edith,—When (if ever) you receive this I shall be dead. I have done my best, but luck has been against me. Do not mourn for me. Fondest love. May you be happy! R. F.”

With a sigh, he closed his eyes; the pencil fell from his fingers, and the notebook rolled on to the sand by his side. He made no effort to recover them, but lay inert. The sun had mounted high in the Heavens, and was drawing furnace-vapours from the scorching sand. He turned and twisted his

face, to try and avert it from the dazzling glare, but without avail. There came a singing sound in his ears, like the hissing of water spilled on a red-hot stove. He could no longer see clearly, and his breath choked in short, panting gasps, quicker and quicker as the end approached.

The vultures circled lower and lower; the skeleton grinned in the sand. Flames devoured him; his tongue, dry and hard, rattled against his teeth, and he felt the pangs of dissolution. At last relief came; there was one convulsive stretch, and then the limp body settled in the sand as a thing from which the breath of life has departed.

It was typical of the irony of fate that, at this very moment Lily was actually on her way to rescue him!

This is how it happened. When the camel bolted, Lily's immediate instinct had been to throw herself to the ground after Robert. But she was impeded by the precautions he had taken to secure her in the saddle, and it also flashed across her mind that to abandon Bijli was to cut themselves off from all chance of escape.

Wherefore, with wonderful presence of mind, she retained her seat, having, of course, no knowledge that Robert had fallen through pain. Gripping the pommel of the saddle, she glanced back just in time to note that there was an unusually high sand-hillock at the spot and to engrave it on her mind as a landmark.

A galloping camel is an uncanny beast to bestride, and at first it was with the greatest difficulty Lily retained her seat. Happily, after a short sprint, Bijli eased down to a trot and she was able to scramble into the driver's seat, and, remembering the peculiar sounds natives make to induce camels

to halt, endeavoured to imitate them. The result was a modified success; Bijli merely slowed, and carried her on another two miles or more at a sedater trot. Do what she would, he refused to halt; it required a jerk at the rein, as well as the peculiar call, to bring him to a standstill, and the rein was trailing on the ground.

At length a happy idea occurred to her. Strapped to the back of the saddle was a bundle of fodder. She extracted a handful and held it out to Bijli. He succumbed to the snare, and was forced into a walk as he hooked his head round to mouth it. That was Lily's opportunity; she grabbed at the rein, and managed to retain hold of it, though she fell to the ground in the process. Bijli was a little startled, but Lily held on, and brought him to a halt. Then she reached up for another handful of fodder, whereat he recovered his composure, and contentedly munched the refreshment she provided with diplomatic abundance.

And now, the problem of returning. She peered into the dark desert; nothing was visible beyond the radius of a few yards. It was as though a curtain of crape hung around her. She must wait till dawn; and so, there she stood sentinel for three long hours, guarding the camel on which their lives depended, and horribly timid of its uncouth craning head and champing teeth.

When, at last, morning broke, to her joy she located the distant sand-hillock. Inspirited by her discovery, she summoned all her courage, and by incessant jabbing at the rein, which was passed through his nostrils, managed to make Bijli squat. Then, all in a flurry, scrambled into the saddle.

And now she began to acquire an insight into the inherent obstinacy of camels. Bijli, induced with difficulty to squat, absolutely refused to rise! Whip

she had none, for it had fallen with Robert. In this dilemma there came an inspiration to her. By the application of about three-quarters of an inch of safety-pin into Bijli's hide, she created a small earthquake, and lo! when the world stood still again, he was on his legs, and she still on his back!

And now, you might have thought her trials were at an end; but such a conclusion shows an inacquaintance with the character of a camel. Instead of answering the rein, Bijli evinced a determined resolution to proceed on a course diametrically opposite to the one Lily desired. Had her eyes been as keen as those of the desert-born, she might have detected an infinite speck on the horizon, which denoted the clump of date-palms shading the half-way desert-well. But Lily only knew Bijli was bearing her away from Robert; so she stopped him, slid off his back, and proceeded on foot to her destination, dragging the camel after her with querulous grunts and grumbles.

The sand was soft and difficult to traverse, and the journey slow. One thing greatly troubled her—there was no sign of Robert. About noon, utterly exhausted and desponding, she reached the hillock. Some minutes were consumed in compelling Bijli up the slope, for she dared not loose her rein. And when she was on the top she was startled by a loud rustle of wings, and from a dip in the ground, a few yards distant, up rose a dozen vultures with scared cries.

Instinctively she looked down, and caught sight of Robert, lying motionless in the full blaze of the sun.

She called to him, but he did not answer. She called again, her voice rising to a terrified scream under the stress of nervous tension and excitement. Not a movement from the prostrate figure! A third

time she screamed, and then caught her breath and choked in a paralysis of dread and fear.

What had happened? Was he dead? Her heart seemed to stop beating; she was too fearful to approach him. And yet she must!

A few feet distant from Robert was the skeleton of a camel peeping out from the sand; hastily dragging Bijli towards it, she tethered him. Then she tottered to Robert's side.

A glance at his face nearly made her faint; but she knew by instinct it was not death she was looking at. He was still alive. There came to her the strange and beautiful courage which often crowns a woman's devotion in the crisis of danger. Running back to Bijli, she unhooked the leatheren water-bottle which was slung to the saddle and returned with it to Robert's side. Kneeling down, she poured a few drops down his lips, and plentifully besprinkled his face and head. With trembling joy and thankfulness, she perceived signs of returning animation; his tongue moved, his features twitched, and a sound like a deep sigh broke from him.

Ah! what happiness was hers! How tenderly she bathed his inflamed face—how deftly gave him to drink! At last her efforts were rewarded with success. Quite unexpectedly, Robert opened his eyes, looked at her, and smiled.

But at that smile Lily broke down utterly. Bending low, she covered his face with hysterical tears and kisses, in a thankful rapture that was wholly uncontrollable.

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO THE DARK UNKNOWN.

ROBERT was too weak to respond to Lily's emotional outburst, but his passive happiness conveyed to her all that her heart could crave. His eyes were fixed on hers with an expression of absorbed love, and his face lifted to return her caresses. In a few moments she recovered control of herself, realising that this was no time to give way to her feelings, when there was so much to do and only she to do it.

Rising to her feet, she disciplined her thoughts. The most urgent necessity was to protect Robert from the sun. There were materials at hand in Bijli's saddle-cloth and the thin, but tough bamboo-poles used to keep its end stretched. With the exercise of a little ingenuity, she erected a sloping screen, which threw a shadow over Robert's body. Next, she un-lashed his knapsack from the saddle, and, filling it with leaves of fodder, extemporised a pillow ; then sat down to resume her ministrations as nurse.

Presently, she experienced a return of anxiety, as a moan broke from him. He seemed uncomfortable, and she tried to lift him into an easier position, which evoked a dolorous groan of pain.

“What is it?” she asked.

And he told her he had been wounded by a spear-thrust in the side.

For a moment her heart sank at this new trial, but the next she was examining into the cause, and discovered the bloodstained bandage he had wound round himself. Quickly unloosening it, she laid bare the gash the spear had made. It needed all her fortitude to bathe and dress it, and staunch the flow of blood, which was draining his strength away. Marvellous was her self-discipline, her resource, her courage. She felt there was no room for weakness, and met the dire necessity of the occasion like a heroine.

It was just this relief that Robert had been wanting. With his wound attended to and the bleeding stopped, with the comparative ease he enjoyed from the grateful shelter, the water she had given him to drink, and the ceaseless fanning, he revived more completely than he had hitherto done.

And now, with his consciousness and power of speech restored, Robert was able to listen to Lily's story, and explain to her how he had been wounded, and why he had kept it hidden from her.

"And so you endured all this torture for my sake—to spare me the anxiety of worrying," commented Lily, in anguish.

"I would have suffered much more for your sake, dear, to get you safely away from that horrible place."

"Poor, poor Rosie," sighed Lily, with a shudder.

"Do not let yourself think about her," said Robert, gravely. "Try and forget Ramjugger as you would a bad dream. Just now it is about yourself you must think. That is what is troubling me. I am so helpless—so useless; such an encumbrance to you."

"Oh, do not say that," she cried. "You are alive, and we are together. Suppose I had not found

you! There was a time when I feared I should never get that dreadful camel back to the sand-hill."

He lay thinking for a few moments.

"That was because you had not got a whip. With a whip I am sure you would be able to control and guide the camel. You will have to try to-night, dear, for your life depends on it. You *must* reach the railway——"

"And you?" she cried, in startled alarm.

"With a little water and some biscuits, I can hang on until you send back relief," he answered.

"Send back relief! What relief could find you in this trackless, unknown place. Sameness and sand, sameness and sand all around! Oh! don't, don't talk like that," she pleaded in piteous accents; "I can never leave you. I don't want to be saved without you! I don't want anything without you!"

He was greatly moved, and yet attempted once more to persuade her. Whereat she burst out crying.

"There, there, darling," he gave in, stroking her hand lovingly; "We will decide nothing until this evening. Perhaps I shall feel stronger then, and able to make an effort."

"Promise me you won't ask me to leave you," she sobbed.

"Little mate," he said, tenderly, "you are captain of the ship now. I will obey you."

She dried her tears, and they sat in silence for a little time. Presently, to her delight, he expressed a wish for food. They had brought some tins of preserved soup with them, and Lily made a fire with stalks of fodder and warmed some up in its own tin, which, with biscuits, afforded a good meal. A little later she persuaded Robert to try and compose himself to sleep. "I will fan you and keep the horrid flies away. And I'm captain now," she reminded him, "and you have to obey!"

He looked up and smiled affectionately at her, and, taking her hand, nestled it under his cheek, and closed his eyes obediently. In a short time, almost without knowing it, he dosed away, and from dosing fell into a profound slumber.

It was past mid-day. The sun had mounted high in the sky, and the desert haze danced in oily, atmospheric waves over the surface of the ground, whilst a mirage painted the horizon with exquisite pictures of green islands floating on placid waters. A strange, lonely, isolated scene; and yet Lily felt supremely happy. Robert was her's now; he had kissed her, and said he belonged to her, and that knowledge compensated for everything else!

She glanced down at his face, and perceived that the sun was creeping over the shelter and would strike down on him in a few minutes. Withdrawing her hand quietly she rose and adjusted the awning. As she was resuming her seat her foot struck against something, and, looking down, she discovered Robert's note book.

To rescue it from its position, half buried in the sand, was a natural action. Then, without any intention of prying, she opened it, and the first thing to meet her eyes was her own name!

She could not resist reading what was written, and with a beating heart turned to learn the revelation.

And as she read, with a thrill of mingled marvel and horror, a curtain fell from her eyes, and she realised for the first time the hideous design that had been contemplated to ruin her. In a flash of revelation the full extent of Robert's service was made apparent. Some dim inkling of the tragic horror of it all, some half-comprehended idea of the existence worse than death to which she would have been consigned but for Robert!

But for Robert! It was he who had saved her; who had been wounded in defending her; who had stayed at Ramjugger, when he had the opportunity to leave, all for her sake! Her heart beat fast and her pulses throbbed as she recognised what he had done, and a wave of glowing love and gratitude overwhelmed her.

She turned again to read the dear lines he had written when he thought he was dying. But, as it chanced, this time the note book opened at another page—the one which contained the message to Edith Carew. At first Lily could not comprehend the change, and turned back a page. There was the message about her, and yet, following it, written after it, this message to—another woman!

Edith Carew! Who was Edith Carew? And what had he written to her? The temptation compelled her to read.

And then she understood. Understood why Robert had always called her his “little sister.” He loved another woman, and it was to the other woman that his last words were addressed! She herself was but a “child” in his eyes! And as she realised this, her little heart fell, the joy and hope that had sustained her faded, and, burying her face in her hands, she broke into a fit of silent weeping.

“Oh, why did I ever meet you?” she moaned to herself. “Why did you teach me to love you? Why did you not tell me of this Edith whom you loved before?”

Just then Robert stirred in his sleep. It brought her to herself, and the shame of what she had done came upon her with a shock. But curiosity still consumed her; with guilty eyes she read again the message to Edith, and impressed the address on her memory. Then waited a moment, undecided what to do with the book. “I will leave it where I found

it," she said, mutinously, and, tossing it on to the ground, pushed it under the sand again.

It was not until nearly sunset that Robert awakened, greatly refreshed. "I feel better—ever so much better," he declared. "If you can only brace this side of mine up I shall be able to get into the saddle somehow, and you must tie me on."

She bathed his wound with water, bandaged it up afresh, and prepared dinner, which was a repetition of the former meal, and they both forced themselves to eat.

The time came to make a start. Lily helped Robert to his feet, and on to the saddle, in the back seat of which she settled him, reserving the driving seat for herself. Then she climbed into her place, adjusted a long strap to encircle Robert's waist and her own, buckled it tightly, and knotted the ends to the pommel.

"You must put your arms round my waist and lean on me," she told him, and he gladly obeyed, for he was in great pain.

"Mind one thing, dear," he warned her in a faint voice, "do not let Bijli take the road to Ramjugger. He is sure to try and do so. I would sooner you were dead than back there."

"There is the afterglow," said Lily, "and in less than half-an-hour we ought to see the North Star. And now hold tightly on to me; I am going to make Bijli rise."

She jerked the rein, and Bijli scrambled to his feet. Lily put his head to the East and gave him a cut of the whip, and he struck briskly out, his neck outstretched, his nose held high, his ears pricked, and grunting every now and again after the manner of camels when excited.

In a few minutes he broke into a trot, which elicited a cry of pain from Robert. Whereat Lily

tried to reduce his pace to a walk again. But she seemed to have lost what little power she ever possessed over the animal, and it soon became apparent he was beyond her feeble control. She tried to guide him, but he insisted on following a direction of his own. He was no longer tired, sluggish, and cold, but rested, fed, and refractory.

And then Robert began to moan and talk incoherently, and cling to her with a tightened clasp. She called to him, but he made no reply. With that all other thoughts but those for him vanished from her mind. Dropping the rein, which she had taken the precaution to fasten to the pommel, she allowed Bijli to follow his own course into the Dark Unknown.

Twisting round in the saddle, Lily passed her arm around Robert's fainting form, and pillow'd his head on her bosom. It was all she could do, and with her arms clasping him close to her, she surrendered herself to what Fate might have in store for them.

A couple of hours passed, and then Bijli suddenly broke into an uncouth canter, and gave vent to bellowing sounds of excitement. There came back answering noises from other camels. Lily looked round; a camp fire gleamed, armed natives rose up, and the air was filled with loud jabbering and chattering.

She pressed Robert's insensible form closer to her, and gave a scream of terror as several wild-looking men dashed forward to catch Bijli's rein and bring him to a halt.

But there was no halting for Bijli. He had reached the goal he was seeking. Pressing on, he sank on his knees with a triumphant grunt, and plunged his muzzle into the grateful waters of the half-way desert well.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAMP IN THE DESERT.

LILY and Robert were safe!

By one of those providential chances, which sometimes interpose to save people in direst peril, they had stumbled upon the camp of Captain Douglas, of the Frontier Military Police, who was "out" after one of the numerous bands of cattle raiders that infest this part of India. His tents were pitched by the half-way well, between Ramjugger and the railway, and the native forms whom Lily had discerned as her senses were leaving her, belonged to such a very comforting folk as His British Majesty's police troopers!

The police officer in India, often a soldier, always a man of action and resource, is competent to confront most difficulties and emergencies, but the re-vivification of a fainting girl in mid-desert is one of the few things beyond the ordinary sphere of his duties. Roused from his slumbers by the report that there was a "*sahib* and *meem-sahib*" awaiting his honour outside, Captain Douglas hastily ran out to convince his eyes of the incomprehensible. And there, sure enough, stretched on the ground by the side of the well, were a European man and woman, both insensible, and their social status utterly unrecognisable in their begrimed condition.

For a moment Captain Douglas was abashed and confounded by the situation, but he rose to it

quickly, and lifting Lily in his arms, carried her to his tent and laid her on his bed. Then returned to attend to Robert, whom he suspected, from his appearance, was far more in need of medical relief. Him he had carried to the tent, too, and laid on the ground, and then set to work to apply restoratives.

Lily was the first to recover, and her first words were—"Robert! Robert!" Presently, as her senses returned, she sat up, looked round in bewilderment, caught sight of Robert's recumbent form on the floor, and attempted to rise and reach him.

"Oh, please don't," entreated Captain Douglas, who by the light of the lamp in the tent had discovered that the "meem-sahib" was a young golden-haired girl, and who was much exercised how to lay hands on her and restrain her from rising.

"He is wounded : he may die," she cried. "Oh let me go to him. He became insensible more than two hours ago. His wound may have broken open again, and he be bleeding to death. I was stupid to faint. I am unhurt and well. Only I was frightened at the armed natives. Please, please let me get up and attend to him."

There was no denying her. Nor could Captain Douglas maintain his objection when Lily insisted on Robert being transferred to the bed. This done, she set to work to unbind and wash his wound, and readjust the bandages, whilst Captain Douglas poured restoratives down Robert's throat, until at last he began to show signs of recovery from his swoon.

"Where am I?" was his first question as he looked in a dazed way at Lily and Captain Douglas.

"In the Police Superintendent's Camp," answered Captain Douglas, "though how you and this young lady struck it is a mystery to me."

"Thank God," murmured Robert. "You will take care of her. She wants care, food, rest. Don't

trouble about me. I'm just a little hazy, but I'll sleep it off. I'm awfully drowsy. Look after Lily,—she wants it," and Robert closed his eyes again, with the abandon of exhaustion, and lay on the bed weak, helpless and semi-conscious, but in no worse case to cause alarm.

"I really must insist on your having some food," said Captain Douglas to Lily; "my *khansamah* has prepared some soup and a supper of sorts. You need be under no anxiety about this gentleman—unless, indeed, you fail to conform to his wishes, which are to let me look after you. That might throw him back, and retard his recovery," he added artfully.

"You are very kind," said Lily, with a wistful glance at Robert. "Perhaps rest is the best thing for him. In a little while he may be stronger and able to take some food." Then, with a hasty, half-shocked look at her own deshabille, and a quick nervous tucking up of her straying hair, which had become unloosened and was down. "Perhaps there is some place where I can retire and make myself a little more presentable."

"Would you like a warm bath? The *khansamah* has a big *dekjie* of water boiling," said Captain Douglas, revealing by the ready bath and ready dinner the fundamental duty of a camp *khansamah* performed according to the elementary rules of camp Cocker.

"Oh, how delicious!" cried Lily, in delightful anticipation.

"Then I will leave you. You will find everything ready in the bathroom tent. When shall dinner be served?"

"In half an hour, please," said Lily, "and would you—would you mind—"

"Certainly I wouldn't—only mention it."

"Lending me a comb," said Lily with a blush, and a pretty smile.

"Of course I will lend you one—if you'll descend to use it," replied Captain Douglas, who felt at that moment he could willingly lend her a thousand rupees for another such smile on her pretty face, and go on repeating the operation till his bank balance was exhausted.

Five minutes before her time Lily was peeping out of the tent, and saying she was "quite ready." And when Captain Douglas returned he was amazed to find how out of the barrenness of a bachelor's desert dressing-room she had managed to "fix herself up" with that wonderful art which enables women to adorn and preen themselves in all manner of fixes and awkward situations. Notwithstanding her thoughts were far away from herself, for she was bending over Robert again, anxious and uneasy at his protracted inertia.

Captain Douglas examined him.

"Don't worry," he said; "he's getting on famously. He is weak from loss of blood and this easeful rest is the very best thing for him. See! he's breathing like a child; not a sign of fever. He couldn't be going better, and we'll get him to take a little soup as soon as you have had yours. Please come and sit down to your meal."

Reluctantly Lily allowed herself to be led to the little camp-table, where an excellent extempore meal was ready. But she was too excited and too exhausted to sip more than a few spoonsful of tea, and toy with a make-believe help of meat, whilst ever and anon her anxious glances wandered to Robert. Captain Douglas, with intuitive tact and sympathy for her anxiety, refrained from troubling her in any way, or even asking for any explanation of the extraordinary means by which she and Robert

had entered his camp at midnight, nor did Lily volunteer any information, her whole attention being absorbed and alert to minister to Robert. Nor did she show any signs of alleviation of her tension until the latter had been induced to swallow a cupful of soup, and had declared that he was feeling "really well" again (although his looks belied the assertion) and thought he could go to sleep.

From which arose a new problem. There was only this one tent, except the three small *rowtees* occupied by the servants and troopers, two of which Captain Douglass had caused to be re-pitched adjoining his own tent. How were they to divide off for the night?

He broached the question, suggesting the arrangement he had thought out as most suitable.

"I have had a couple of small tents pitched alongside this one," he said, "and I propose to transfer Mr. Robert to one of them, so as to leave you this tent. I will look after him and be responsible for him till the morning."

"Indeed, no!" exclaimed Lily. "I could not think of such a thing. He may have a restless night; he will want constant attention. I could not rest unless I were near him, to hear when he called."

"But you want undisturbed rest yourself," protested Captain Douglass, who could have offered several other conventional objections to Lily's proposal.

"I want nothing but to look after Robert," was Lily's way of clenching the matter; and she had her own way. At her command—albeit the request was prettily proposed—a temporary bed was made up for her on the floor by Robert's side, Captain Douglass' entire wardrobe was placed at her disposal, including (an addenda he was very proud of) a pair of scissors and some needles and thread, and, with many injunctions to call him if he could be of the slightest

assistance, the gallant police-officer left the unconventional girl to her self-imposed duties!

It was a hard night for Lily. After an hour's slumber, Robert grew very restless; and it was plain to see that fever was coming on. Lily rose from her bed on the floor—on which she had thrown herself, fully dressed, as it seemed to her, but a few moments ago—and all through the long hours she sat by his side, ministering to his wants, rearranging his bandages and keeping them soaked with cooling water, and helping him, who was but half conscious, to shift his position when it grew painful. Many times during his lucid intervals he urged her to rest, to call assistance, to leave him to himself and he would worry through all right; but she was far too anxious to do so; and when Captain Douglas presented himself, in the morning, with a tray of early tea, and she came out to see him, he was shocked by her weary eyes and her lack-lustre face.

"You'll break down," he said, "and then what shall I do? You haven't had a wink of sleep all night, I am sure."

"I couldn't sleep — after the first hour," answered Lily, too exhausted to conceal what she had suffered. "He was tossing about and in great pain. But I think he is better now. He has asked for a cup of tea. Will you come in and see him?"

There was not much appearance of Robert being better. He welcomed Captain Douglas with a faint smile that was half apologetic.

"I don't know who you are," he whispered, "but I am deeply grateful to you. I never expected to see a white face again. We have had a most miraculous escape."

"Your arrival in my camp at midnight appeared equally miraculous to me," confessed Captain Douglas.

"I will tell you our story in a little time," said Robert, in a weak voice. "I don't think I am quite up to it now. My head is so swimmy. Only, I want to beg one thing of you. Make Miss Willis lie down and rest. She won't attend to me. She has been up with me all the night, and—look at her!"

"I'm perfectly well," declared Lily, trying to put on a brave smile. "And if I could only see you looking better—"

"I will get better directly you lie down," declared Robert—and proved it by going off into a faint!

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried Lily, beginning to whimper. And then, with a masterful resolution, wonderful in such a young girl, she pulled herself together, and set to work helping Captain Douglas to bring Robert round again.

"Thank God, I sent an express *sowar* for the civil surgeon last night," said Captain Douglas, as he watched Robert's face anxiously. "I am afraid he is going to have an attack of fever—and he's so weak, so dreadfully weak!"

"Don't tell me there is any danger," cried Lily, in a sudden panic of alarm. "Oh, it cannot be. We have escaped such awful perils. Don't tell me there is anything worse to come."

Captain Douglas looked with pitying eyes at the frail and tottering form of the girl, as she bent over Robert, administering restoratives and keeping command upon herself. The sight almost unmanned him—it was so touching, so pathetic.

"There is no cause for anxiety," he tried to assure her. "Fever never kills Europeans. The civil surgeon will be here by three o'clock this afternoon, and this evening we'll get him into Gungaram. Dr. Slater is awfully clever at his profession, and he'll have him as right as a rivet inside a week, I'll be bound."

"Oh, God, I pray he may," murmured Lily, in a choking voice. "I cannot stand much more. I thought he was dead yesterday. But he did not look so ill then as he does now."

"Take heart, Miss Willis," said the Captain, kindly and sympathetically. "You are overwrought, and you see things very differently to what you would have done if you had enjoyed a proper night's rest. Believe me, you cannot do any good here. Just retire to my tent, and have a quiet lie down. You have been on duty all night; trust your patient to me for a few hours of daylight. Do—please, please do."

"Oh, I can't, I can't," cried Lily. "I couldn't rest. I must be by his side. He will want me when he comes to his senses. I—I am getting used to his ways," she urged, with pretty hesitation.

Nothing would induce her to relinquish her post. The utmost concession she would make was to allow Captain Douglas to place a comfortable camp armchair by Robert's bed, and to recline in that. And there she sat, all through the hot hours of the day, as she had through the long hours of the night, tending the man she loved.

It was not until four o'clock that Dr. Slater arrived. Captain Douglas was the first to perceive his camel—a dim spot in the desert mirage—and he rode out to meet him and acquainted him with the extraordinary facts of the case, and the necessity for exerting his authority to make Lily rest, or she would infallibly break down. The civil surgeon was a middle-aged, kind-hearted man, and he at once assumed a paternal attitude towards Lily.

"My dear," he said to her, "if you want to know the truth, you are in much greater danger than this gentleman. And then, again, you're a constant worry on his mind, for he's asked me three times to

make you rest. It's that worry which is increasing his fever. There is nothing like mental agitation to make the temperature go up. He's at 104 degrees as it is, and if he goes up another degree—then it will be danger. And he'll go up that degree if you stop here and make him anxious about you. He's in good hands now, and you may safely leave him to me—I'll pull him round; but I'm not so confident of pulling you round, unless you shut those pretty blue eyes of yours, and rest that troubled little brain. So now, my dear?"

"Oh, I'll do anything if you'll only make him better."

"Good. That's a bargain. You go to bed, and I promise to make him better. There—there! I've a daughter of my own who's bigger than you, and I'm sure you'll be guided by an old man's advice."

"You're very, very kind," said Lily. "I should be wicked and ungrateful to disobey you."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW.

IT is a week later. The clouds have cleared away at last—though for a day or two they rolled over Lily and Robert blacker than ever. They are at green Gungaram, the pretty head-quarters station of the district. Robert is in the Civil Surgeon's bungalow, where he has been skilfully treated and restored to convalescence; Lily is residing near at hand with Mrs. La Touche, the wife of Mr. La Touche, the Deputy Commissioner or Civil Administrator and head of the district. She is allowed now to see Robert twice a day, and is a little rebellious at the restriction. But it is better, she admits, than not being allowed to see him at all, which was her cruel case for forty-eight miserable and torturing hours. Then came a change for the better in his condition; the fever left him, and his wound responded to the stitching and the surgical treatment, and began to heal. The return of Lily completed the cure. The sun shone again upon them; the sky seemed blue overhead. But, to windward, although they did not notice it, a small cloud was rising. No bigger than a man's hand—but fateful.

It was connected with Ramjugger, and the Rajah. For four days after their rescue Robert had been too ill to make any report or give any account of the astounding happenings at Ramjugger, and the incontestable but difficult to prove murder of Miss

Faloon. Lily's freedom of speech had been greatly hindered by her guilty knowledge, obtained by reading Robert's note book, of the real reason why Miss Faloon had been poisoned, and the attempt made to destroy Robert. She had told her story, but it sounded too bizarre and improbable to be believed, for she could not reveal the keynote of the motive without which the cold-blooded murder she spoke of seemed senseless and beyond comprehension or credence. The authorities at Gungaram were inclined to believe that the explanation which Lily had let drop as an unimportant detail, namely that Miss Faloon had died of cholera, was the true one, and Lily's wildly improbable story the involuntary imagination of her overtaxed mental stress. Dr. Slater had forbidden Robert to be questioned in any way, and thus it happened that a week passed and no step whatever was taken to obtain retribution for the foul deeds committed at Ramjagger.

It was, of course, Robert's duty to make the necessary report; but in the first place he was far too ill to do so, and, later on, with returning health, his joy at Lily being allowed to see him again put the tragedy into the background of his mind. It seemed indeed a thing of long, long ago; for although his illness had been of brief duration it had somehow placed a gulf between the present and that past, which though it was really of yesterday, appeared to him far more remote. Lily was his present and his future—he shirked the disagreeable task of raking up the past again until he was mentally stronger and physically better. Lily and her love—these were all he wanted at the present moment. They were curing him, and he very gratefully gave the cure full scope.

With this explanation let us return to the story. Robert had been permitted to leave his bed for the

first time, and was sitting propped up in an armchair in the shady verandah. Lily was with him by permission "for one hour—and he is not to be excited, mind." Mrs. La Touche with womanly tact and sympathy had left them alone, remembering that two is company and three none.

Lily had taken her seat by Robert's side, and no sooner were they alone than her hand stole into his.

"I have something to tell you," she said, "a secret which I have mentioned to nobody."

He looked surprised—"What is it, Lily?" he asked.

For a reply her hand went into the bosom of her dress, and she drew out a packet carefully secured in a native silk handkerchief. "Do you recognise this?"

"I can't say I do."

"It is the package which Tom Bobus gave me from the Ranee Dewali."

"By George!" exclaimed Robert, his interest instantly aroused. "What's in it?"

"Look," said Lily, and handed it over to him to open.

He unloosed the knots and displayed the contents. First and foremost a magnificent necklace of diamonds and rubies, worth a Rajah's ransom; next an envelope containing a document. And the document was the Ranee Rosalie's last Will and Testament, leaving all her fortune to her sister Lily Willis. There was a memorandum in her Uncle's handwriting showing the amount—some eighteen thousand pounds and where it was invested. In Government of India securities safe in a Bombay Bank, thanks to the craft of General Faloon, who had caused himself to be appointed sole trustee.

"Lily!" he cried, "here's all my best wishes to you, dear little heiress! You are worthy to inherit

this magnificent necklace—and that is the extremest praise I can imagine from the point of view of a young lady who is rather fond of gems and jewels!"

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw it," confessed Lily. "It took my breath away. And dear, dear Rosie leaving me all this money! Oh, I shall never like to spend it when I think of the penalty she paid for it!"

"Poor Ranee," murmured Robert, as he shook his head gravely. "But out of evil and suffering cometh good. I was so fearful of your circumstances. Only of course——"

"Of course—what?"

"Why—I was a little glad, because I promised your dear, brave Aunt to look after you. And now I am a little sorry because this has rendered my help unnecessary."

"And you won't help me—you won't share it with me?" asked Lily, on the spur of an indignant moment. "Then I don't want the necklace or the money or—or anything!" And giving way to one of her impulsive humours she snatched up the parcel from Robert's lap and tossed it on to an adjacent table.

He was amused at her little tantrums—it was so like the Lily he had been accustomed to before the awful perils they had gone through together transformed her, in a week, from a giddy girl into a young woman.

"I always *want* to help you, dear," he said, "only now my help is not necessary."

"Oh, but it is. It is always necessary! And when you talk like you did just now you make me miserable," said Lily in a low voice.

"And all I want is to make you happy."

"Then why don't you?" she asked, with splendid audacity; "you know you can, or you could,

if——” The thought of that other woman flashed across her mind, and she realised she had allowed her words to run on too far. Robert pulled her up quickly.

“Or could if—what?”

“Nothing,” she said; and hurriedly repeated “Nothing,” and looked very miserable.

Her temper touched him instantly.

“Lily, dear,” he asked, “what would make you happy?”

“To go to the Seychelles—with you,” was her frank answer. “Only I know you won’t take me, because——” again she broke off. That recollection of the other woman seemed to have a fatal propensity for influencing the end of her sentences.

“Because——?” he insisted.

And again she relapsed into the negative.

“Nothing—nothing—nothing!” Then she broke down. “Oh, Robert,” she cried, “why won’t you take me to those beautiful islands?”

“I should like to; I have longed to do so for many days past. But, you are an heiress now——”

“And does that make any difference?”

“It naturally makes some difference. And, besides—I have a secret, too, Lily. And that secret places a lock upon my tongue.”

“You have a secret?” She faltered. And then her heart cried within her, “I knew it! I knew it!” and rising from her chair she walked hurriedly to the further end of the verandah and stood there, her bosom heaving and the tears welling into her eyes.

Robert rose, painfully, and followed her. The burden of his secret was too great for him. It had kept him, with his alias name and false identity, from revealing his love for her in words. But now a greater influence was at work—the knowledge that she was suffering through his secret; that her heart

was seared because he might not speak to her honestly and frankly, and ask of her the one question that he longed to do and it was clearly his duty to do.

"Lily," he said, and stole his arm around her waist, "Will you trust me? My secret is not mine to surrender. It is concerned with a person in England whom I love very much. I have made up my mind what to do. I am going to send a cable-message home, and when I get the reply——"

"Yes? Yes?" she answered, in a quick, excited tone.

"I am going to ask you, darling, to be my wife and to confess everything to you. If you can forgive me, and will accept me——"

"If——?" she cried; and that was all. The next minute she was in his arms and there passed between them the first burning kiss of love.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

A voice sounded behind them; and, as they blushingly disengaged and hastily looked round—there was Mrs. La Touche, who always accompanied Lily to Dr. Slater's as her chaperon. Mrs. Slater and the Doctor's daughter, of whom he had spoken, were (it may be mentioned) in England.

"Pray don't apologise, Mrs. La Touche," said Robert, as Lily incontinently fled into the drawing-room. "But grant me the privilege of half-an-hour's conversation, that I may explain the relations between Lily and myself."

Mrs. La Touche took the chair Lily had lately vacated and Robert resumed his seat. And then, in a few words, he told her of how strangely Lily and he had been thrown together, the perils they had survived in company, and the love that had grown up between them. And, for the first time, he revealed his story of the awful plot that had been hatched by the late General Faloon and the Rajah of Ramjugger for

Lily's ruin, and allowed himself the relief of pouring into her ears his opinion of the foul villain who could sell this innocent girl to shame.

"And now," he said, as he finished his story, "you can understand the position in which you surprised Lily and myself. I had just asked her to be my wife."

"Dear, dear child," said Mrs. La Touche, who had grown to love Lily; "I am so happy for her sake. I have seen the state of her feelings from the first moment I saw you and her together. But, from some vague words she let slip, I gathered there was no hope for her."

"Circumstances—which I cannot explain at present—have conspired to prevent my offering myself to Lily. Indeed, I should not have done so to-day, but the temptation surprised and overcame me. But it has done one good thing—determined me to summarily terminate those—those circumstances of which I speak, and regain my perfect freedom of action. Only I ought to have done it, really, before I proposed to Lily."

The intention, and the method of executing it, were decided on in Robert's mind. That very day he sent a cablegram to Edith, asking for a reply, and the next morning received an answer from her. It shocked him inexpressibly, for it absolutely prevented him from obtaining that freedom of action which he had spoken of to Mrs. La Touche. And, what was worse, it compelled him to go to Bombay without allowing him to explain to the girl he loved, and who was now his affianced wife, the reason why he must leave her.

But she had no complaint to make when he told her. "Everything that Robert did was right"—that was Lily's doctrine. This strange decision did not disturb her equanimity or confidence in the

least ; it only saddened her because it would necessitate a short separation. Robert had promised to be back in three days—that was sufficient. Besides, he might kill two birds with one stone—do his own business and find out about the sailings of the steamers to the Seychelles.

“Wouldn’t they be a heavenly place to spend our honeymoon in, Robert ?” she asked, naïvely. And, for a reply, he took her in his arms and swore she would make any place a heaven for him.

Dr. Slater’s leave had to be obtained, of course, for Robert was still a patient in his hands.

“ You shall go on Thursday,” said the medico. “ Not a day before. That gash on your side wants three clear days to heal completely. And I’ve got to pour a tonic into you.”

“ Right you are, Doctor. I have every confidence in you.”

“ And yet you don’t give me your confidence,” said Dr. Slater, in a tone of bantering reproach.

“ How do you mean ?”

“ When is the wedding to be ?”

“ Oh—ah—yes,” stammered Robert, blushing. “ Very soon after I return from Bombay, I hope.”

“ You’ll be able to get a wedding-ring there, anyhow,” laughed the Doctor.

“ Yes,” said Robert, thoughtfully, “ I will.”

The three clear days passed delightfully. The engagement of Robert and Lily had been announced, and they were treated with that tactful restraint which is the greatest kindness you can accord newly-engaged couples. They were secured the isolation they loved, haunting shady corners of the verandah, wandering in all the quietest nooks of the lovely garden, and religiously left to play bézique and propose and accept as much as they liked every evening after dinner.

And so the morning came for Robert's departure. His train started at noon. At ten o'clock, in the morning, who should come riding up to the bungalow but Captain Douglas. He was supposed to be fifty miles away, out in camp, but he explained that he had been summoned back by an urgent telegram, and the grave expression on his face confirmed that he was labouring under a weighty anxiety.

Notwithstanding, much to Robert's disgust, who wanted to wile away the last precious hour with Lily, he would not depart, but lingered and lingered—always in sight, as it seemed to Robert. And when the time came to start for the station he had the bad taste to thrust himself forward and accompany Robert, Lily, and Dr. Slater in the same "Gungaram chariot," as the hack *gharries*, or cabs of the station, were called.

Tears were in Lily's eyes as she said good-bye, and a frown on her forehead. And was it not enough to make her frown, with that horrid Captain Douglas there, glueing his eyes on Robert, so that there was no chance for a parting kiss? And, to make matters worse, he had not the politeness to shake hands with Robert at the final farewell, but just gave him a nod of the head, and an impertinent "See you again."

And went forthwith to the telegraph-office, where he wired a message to Calcutta :

"Bolt left twelve o'clock train : due at Byculla six to-morrow morning. D. S. P. Gungaram."

* * * * *

At six o'clock the next morning, as Robert—rather knocked-up and exhausted by night-travelling—was painfully descending from the carriage, his ears were petrified by the sound of a voice which seemed to penetrate from another world. He flashed round to confirm what his senses could hardly credit. But his senses had not deceived him.

"That's the man—Robert Bolt. I swear to him!"

The speaker was—General Faloon!

The next instant a pair of handcuffs were snapped on Robert's wrists by an expert hand, and a small, wiry, determined-looking man, attended by a European constable, spoke the words which explained the situation:

"Robert Fawcitt, I arrest you, in the name of the law, for the attempted murder of Septimus Strickland."

CHAPTER XXII.

OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE.

“ I’m not Robert Fawcitt,” cried Robert aghast. It was the only reply he could think of on the spur of the moment.

“ Then all you have got to do is to prove that you’re not. Meanwhile we say you are—Robert Fawcitt, alias Robert Bolt. Do you deny the alias? But before you answer I warn you of one thing. Anything you say may be used in evidence against you.”

It was impossible for Robert to deny that he was Robert Bolt, so he very prudently held his tongue.

Which was the very thing that General Faloon did not do. “ Oh, you viper and villain! ” he burst out irascibly, smacking the air viciously with his red bandana handkerchief, and his face crimson with rage and indignation. “ What is this I hear and read in the papers of your criminal abomination? Eloped with my poor little innocent niece, have you? And stolen the Ranee Rosalie’s state necklace? I could slaughter you as you stand there, miscreant! Could slaughter you like an ox! ”

All he said was Hebrew to Robert, saving that he knew an account of his and Lily’s miraculous escape had appeared in the Bombay papers. But the reference to the stolen necklace alarmed him, for Lily had kept that matter secret.

Under the circumstances he thought silence was the best course to pursue. He was, indeed, too bewildered to say or do anything without committing himself. So he just cast a contemptuous glance at General Faloon and turned his back on him.

This served to fan the flames of the General's passion to crackling point.

"Curse you," he flared out; "no wonder you cannot look me in the face. The man you attempted to assassinate on board a sinking steamer! And if—and if you have stained the innocence of my little Lily, by heavens, foul villain, I'll throttle you with my own thumbs." The which he exhibited threateningly.

And now it was Robert's turn to become enraged. The insult to his honour whipped him into a sudden fury, as a squall at sea whips the waves into foaming breakers. "Hell-hound," he cried, looking daggers at the General, "*I know the truth.* How dare *you* pollute the innocence of Lilian Willis with your guilty lips? Under Providence it was I who saved her honour, which you would have sold for money. Were my hands but free I would—" He lifted his clenched fists and manacled arms helplessly in the air, and made a step towards the General.

"Mr. Lowe," cried the latter quickly, "I claim your protection from this—this murderer." And as a sign of a less pugnacious attitude hastily thrust his red bandana handkerchief into his side pocket, with an uneasy feeling that, if exposed, it might act on Robert as a red rag does on a bull.

The detective could not suppress a smile.

"You're all safe, General. He has got the bracelets on. And this is no time for letting fly at him. You can have your go on when we've done with him—and I am afraid you won't get much change out of that."

"And similarly," said Robert, who had regained his composure, "I can have my go at you when I've done with Mr. Lowe. You won't find me shirking—and if I don't nail you up like carrion to the reprobation of the world my name's not —" he halted awkwardly, vexed at the way in which he had allowed himself to frame his words.

"— Robert Fawcitt," put in Detective Lowe with an accommodating smile. "But don't anticipate too eagerly, for I don't think you'll have the chance of fighting it out with General Faloon for twenty years—if your life is spared."

"We'll see," said Robert with an air which struck the detective as one of bravado. As for the General he was a changed man, out of whose system all the starch had gone. The mere hints which Robert had let drop had the most extraordinary effect upon him. His jaw dropped, his face turned a brick-brown colour, and his globular, fishy eyes glanced uneasily and timorously at Robert as if to try and find out how much he knew.

By this time the constable had taken all Robert's baggage out of the compartment, and put it into the vehicle that was waiting to take him away.

"Come," said Detective Lowe, and led Robert to the door. "Won't you come with us?" he asked the General, as he waited for him to enter.

"I couldn't ride in the same *gharrie* as a murderer," declared Faloon. "His touch—ahem—pollutes." He thought that was a fine retort on Robert.

"Well you must be at the police court at ten sharp to give your evidence. I intend to run the extradition through express, and start by the P. and O. mail this afternoon. I'm a bit nervous of the plague and seeing the blacks here dying like flies. Sooner the prisoner is out of danger of contagion the better I shall like it."

He spoke the truth. Bombay was in the throes of the Asiatic plague, and the mortality amongst the natives fearful. And the General's extra crimson countenance owed something of its colour to the brandy he had been drinking morning, noon and night to give him Dutch courage.

The carriage drove off.

"Now look here," said Detective Lowe to Robert, "are you going to be reasonable? 'Cause if you are you'll find it comfortabler, like. I don't hold with making a humiliating spectacle of a European in this heathen land, and I'll do my best to make things run smooth for you if you'll do the same for me. And that's spoken man to man."

"Can I communicate with anyone?"

"No," said Detective Lowe, "you can't."

"Well, I'll give you a reply presently. I must think it over. The charge against me is for the *attempted* murder of Strickland?"

"That's so."

"Then he can't be dead yet?"

"I shouldn't like to say. It's a case as I hear has beaten all the scientists in St. Bartholomew's hospital. The man's alive, and yet dead. It just wants one thin thread to snap, and he's out. But according to last advices the thread hasn't snapped yet!"

"Meanwhile," argued Robert, with marvellous coolness, "I'm not a murderer?"

"Meanwhile you're not a murderer. Only I shouldn't put it that way if I were you," said Detective Low. "It's an armistice between us, and we're just settling terms, and I don't hold you cautioned over this conversation."

"I was speaking hypothetically," explained Robert. "You say I am Robert Fawcitt and have committed this crime—and you've got to prove it."

"Likewise I say you're Robert Bolt, and you've got to unprove it."

"That's another matter."

"No, it isn't. Robert Bolt is Robert Fawcitt, just the same as he was Darcy Barrington, and—you had a fine cheek, you had!—Septimus Strickland."

"Dear me," said Robert, pretending not to comprehend, "you do say funny things."

"Well, you take it cool, and give me the cool 'uns for choice. You and me will get on well if you want to. Same as the man did who gave me that ring."

"Who was he?"

"He was a murderer, too—and he was hung. I tapped him on the back in South America, and got him to England without a handcuff. We played poker together all the voyage. Might have been my brother, to see us together. Gave me that ring,"—he exhibited a very handsome diamond one to Robert—"the night before his execution. Wept when we parted—at parting, mind you; not because he was going to be hung. That's the sort of prisoner I like to have the hunt after."

"Do you?" said Robert. "Well, I'll try and follow the edifying example, all except giving you a diamond ring and getting hung, of course. Only, I want you to do one thing for me."

"What's that?"

"To send a couple of telegrams to two ladies. One is the girl I'm engaged to."

The Detective shook his head.

Robert frowned.

"I shan't weep when we part," he said. "I thought you were a decent chap, and wanted me to save you trouble, and to catch to-day's mail steamer."

As a matter of fact, though he had been too

cautious to urge it, Detective Lowe wanted that most urgently. Like many a man who takes his life in his hands, and faces countless perils in a dangerous profession, he was as brave as a lion on the warpath of duty, but as funky as a flunkey of fever, plague, cholera, or any of those diseases which are common in India. He had only arrived in Bombay two days ago, but he had seen enough plague-corpse to frighten him into a panic, and his one paramount wish was to hurry through the extradition and get away from the plague-stricken city by that afternoon's mail-steamer.

He was silent for a moment, and then observed, rather gloomily :

“ Well, if I don't catch the mail—I don't.”

“ And you won't,” added Robert, “ for I'll have the best counsel and lawyers in Bombay, and get remand after remand. I've got a stronger case than you think, and I'll give you all the trouble I can.”

“ What telegrams do you want to send off?” asked Lowe, with a halting cough.

“ Lend me a pencil, and give me three moments to compose them, and then decide whether you can oblige me or not. If you find yourself able to do so, I'll promise to oblige you, in return, by putting no impediment in the way of my extradition.”

“ You're a cool 'un,” repeated the Detective. “ There's a pencil, and there's the back of an envelope. Write.”

And Robert, after two moments of concentrated thought, wrote :

(To *Lily*.) “ Trust me, little mate, I've been in worse peril than this. The thought of you will pull me through.”

and

(To *Mrs. La Touche*.) “ General Faloon, *Lily's* uncle, whom we thought dead, is alive and in

Bombay. Protect her from him and do not believe all you read about me."

"There," he said, handing the envelope back to Lowe. "There's no secret cipher in that."

The Detective read them.

"I don't believe there is," he said. "Call it a bargain."

At that moment the carriage drew up at the police-court, and Robert was taken to one of the cells for safe custody until the Court opened. There he was searched, and everything taken from him. With deep thankfulness, he blessed himself for having destroyed Edith's cablegram to him—which brought to mind the loss of his notebook. He had only discovered it when he wanted to put Edith's message away, and had regretted its loss; but, in default of that receptacle for papers, had destroyed the flimsy bit of paper that must have ruined everything had he retained it in his keeping. The pocket-book, too, with the dying message he had written to Edith, would have given him away, and he now thanked his stars for having dropped it in the desert, as he fondly imagined. Trifles both, and yet they impressed him with the belief that his luck was changing! Ever since that fatal evening, when he left England, he had encountered nothing but dangers and adversities, until this culminating disaster when the hand of the law had overtaken him. And it was in this hour that he began, for the first time, in his adversities, to see a real gleam of hope. And the fact that his dying message to Edith Carew, and her cablegram to him were both out of Detective Lowe's reach was at the bottom of this new-found belief.

At ten o'clock he was taken before the magistrate, and found himself in a court crowded with spectators who had collected to see the man whose strange adventure—first in the open boat that escaped

from the *Humber Maid*, and later in the incomprehensible desert flight from Ramjugger—had raised their curiosity. And here he was, accused of the most heinous of all crimes, and his extradition demanded in order that he might answer a charge of attempted murder in the dock of a London police court.

James Lowe, the detective, gave evidence. It was much of it formal. Three points arrested Robert's attention. It seems his whereabouts had been discovered by a curious concatenation of circumstances in which a mysterious telegram from a mysterious stranger to the Chief Superintendent at Scotland Yard, the wine card he had accidentally signed in his real name on board the *Humber Maid* as they were entering Port Said, and the farewell telegram he had sent Edith when he was leaving Liverpool, had been the salient factors. The detective had tracked him with unusual skill, and compelled the admiration of the spectators for his shrewdness as he followed, step by step, the devious flight of Mr. Darcy Barrington, Mr. Septimus Strickland, and Mr. Robert Bolt from the Mersey to Gungaram, whither, two days ago, Lowe had telegraphed to Captain Douglas, the District Superintendent of Police, to keep an eye upon Bolt, until he could be identified by General Faloon. Lowe concluded his statement by saying that he had a witness in attendance to identify the accused, and give evidence which, he declared, would satisfy the magistrate that he ought to grant the extradition.

Whereupon General Faloon stepped into the witness box, for the ordeal of which he had prepared himself by several potations of brandy. He was in what might be called a racketty condition, which, in one of his bulk, was dangerous. But he disguised his liquor well under an artfully assumed air of irascibility,

relieved at times by a relapse into poignant grief, as he buried his face in the ample folds of his red bandana handkerchief.

Detective Lowe questioned him, almost as nervously as the General answered his questions, for he realised that he had a very weak witness in so much that he was a very drunk one, although he did not advertise it as a less hardened toper might have done. With admirable dexterity he drew his story out, bit by bit. It created an enormous sensation, and that appealed to the General's vanity, and presently he brisked up a bit. His evidence painted Robert's conduct in the blackest light, especially in regard to his attentions to Lily—"His dear innocent little niece who had been ruined by her elopement with the abandoned villain from the protecting arms of her aunt and sister at Ramjugger." At which point Robert, quite aghast, cried out, "But they are both dead. I believe they were both murdered."

"Dead!" retorted the General. "I heard about them only yesterday, you monster. And the theft of the Ranee's ruby and diamond necklace? But retribution will reach you, wicked man, wicked man! His Highness the Rajah has sworn by the honour of his ancestors the Sun Gods —"

At this interesting moment the magistrate interposed, and said that was a matter not before the Court, and they could not go into it, and he desired the witness to confine himself to what he knew against the prisoner in connection with the charge before the Court.

Whereupon the General returned to his mutton; explained how Robert had boarded the *Humber Maid* as she was steaming out of Gibraltar; the incident of the wine card signed in his name of "R. Fawcitt" and dropped overboard by him purposely—as the General now recognised; and his extraordinary

behaviour at Port Said, where he had hidden himself in the stoke hole all day. Finally he came to his version of the collision.

"There was a collision. I am given to understand, the prisoner escaped in an open boat with my sister and niece. He dashed me insensible to the deck when I was trying to get life buoys for them, and because I proposed to protect them, saying there was no room for a fourth in the boat. But for the mercy of Providence I should have gone down with the steamer. I was the last to be saved!" And with that he struck a tragic, dramatic attitude, and elevated his red bandana handkerchief to symbolise a flag nailed to the mast of a sinking ship.

Robert declined to cross-question the hoary old liar, simply contenting himself with saying that his evidence was a tissue of falsehoods, and he would know how to deal with him at some future time, when he returned to give evidence in the witness-box against the General, who would then be in the dock—an example of audacious prediction that positively staggered Detective Lowe and created an impression amongst the spectators that Robert was mad, and his madness probably the true explanation of his murderous attack on his partner. As for his assertion that Miss Faloon and the Ranee Rosalie were dead—and probably murdered—no one attached the slightest credence to it; and Robert, confident that Mrs. La Touche would protect Lily, and anxious not to involve the latter in an inquiry when he could not be at hand to assist her, came to the conclusion that, despite the dangerous suggestion of the stolen State necklace (which, however, Tom Bobus would be able to disprove, if necessary), it was best not to open out the black tragedy of Ramjugger until the road of retribution was clearer.

The magistrate consulted with his clerk on some

technical points, and then, turning to Robert, asked him if he had any defence to make.

"I recommend you not to commit yourself to any statement," he said. "In such a serious case as this, I am quite prepared to grant a remand, if you desire to avail yourself of legal assistance. I understand that you were arrested only four hours ago, and have had no time to prepare your defence."

"I will reserve my defence for my trial in England," said Robert. "I make no opposition to my extradition."

"There only remains for me to give the order," said the magistrate, as Robert finished speaking. "Sergeant Lowe, I grant your application for the extradition of Robert Fawcitt."

"I thank your worship," said Detective Lowe; and tapped Robert on the shoulder, as a sign for him to leave the dock.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WORD ABOUT RICHARD.

THAT afternoon at five o'clock Robert was on board the mail steamer *Chitral* steaming out of Bombay Harbour, and Detective Lowe was congratulating himself upon the smartness with which he had effected the capture and extradition and shipped his prisoner off.

After the excitement of the day, which had kept Robert up—for he was a man never so strong as under adversity—the natural reaction set in. By sunset misery claimed him as her own. As he sat, locked up in a small, dark, lower deck, second-class cabin, he bowed his head and fretted at the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Things, which in the whirl and bustle of the day, had not assumed the blackest aspect, were now magnified into hideous dangers. Lily was paramount in his thoughts to the exclusion of all personal considerations. Indeed he recked nothing for himself; his anxiety was all for her. Suppose Mrs. La Touche failed him. Suppose General Faloon was able to get her back into his own keeping and control? Suppose he made her return to Ramjugger with him? The thought was torturing. Too late Robert recognised he ought to have asked for a remand, and made a formal report about the suspicious circumstances attending the deaths of the Ranee Rosalie and Miss Faloon. General Faloon, without asserting it, had left it to be

inferred they were both alive. True, Lily might protest and declare she had seen her Aunt dead, but the General was perfectly capable of swearing it was only a case of catalepsy, and so smoothing matters over until he got Lily into his power. It was imperative for him to silence her tongue, and the easiest way to do this was to reclaim his authority over her. Who was there to say him nay? Robert groaned as he reflected that he had not exposed the true character of her Uncle to Lily, and although Mrs. La Touche might reveal it, Lily had always exhibited a certain awed affection as well as a great respect for the General, and his old influence would probably suffice to counteract any new influence Mrs. La Touche might try to exert.

Thus he narrowed possibilities down to the point, and they became to his over-wrought imagination actual horrors. With sighs and self-reproaches he abused himself for the passive part he had adopted. He made no allowance for his illness and fever, or for the fact that Dr. Slater would not allow him to be questioned. He took all the blame upon his own shoulders, who ought to have made a report of the tragedy of Ramjugger directly he regained his senses. By his silence he had ruined Lily, for it was quite possible that if she told the story (who knew nothing of the true motives that explained the terrible crimes which had been committed) she would not be credited simply because she could not invest her narrative with an elementary air of probability. The plot that had been concocted to bring about her marriage with the Rajah explained everything. She knew nothing of that foul plot; she could only relate an incredible and unconvincing series of facts; and when it was found that the ruby and diamond necklace was actually in her possession, as well as the Ranee Rosalie's will, it could be twisted into evidence

that what the General had hinted at, namely, an elopement, was true!

Of course, all these monstrous fancies, which thronged Robert's fevered brain, cannot but strike the reader as far-fetched and improbable. But the truth was Robert was ill and no longer master of a clear mental sense. The morning after leaving Bombay he collapsed, and fever and delirium were his portion for the next twenty-four hours. When the attack had succumbed to remedies, he lay in his bunk, a wreck of a man, with hopelessness and despair writ large in his face.

Detective Lowe attributed his utter breakdown, mental and physical, to the fact that he was being taken home to stand his trial for what would probably prove the murder of his partner Septimus Strickland. In his experience he had seen many similar cases of men who carried themselves with a bold and devil-may-care bearing up to a certain pitch and then went to pieces. But Robert was not of that mettle, as the detective found out the day they arrived at Aden. Here the latest telegrams were brought on board, and in one from Bombay it was announced that there had been a serious recrudescence of the plague, resulting in the death of several Europeans. And one of them was General Ferdinando Faloon, who had been found dead the previous morning on a bench on the Esplanade.

When Lowe conveyed this news to Robert the effect was magical. From that instant the prisoner was a changed man. He could be heard singing in his dark cabin, and asked for an extra quarter of an hour's exercise on deck—handcuffs or no handcuffs. For, during three or four preceding days, Lowe had doubted him and suspected suicidal tendencies, and hence the precautions which had mortified and humiliated Robert more than anything else.

But now all was changed. He was suddenly translated into as high spirits as he had formerly been in low ones; his appetite picked up, his powers of sleep returned, and several times he "wished the voyage was at an end."

Lowe was amazed.

"What's come to you?" he asked. "Why are you chirpy all of a sudden, like this?"

"My mind's easy," said Robert, enigmatically.

"Your mind easy? Don't you never think of the charge you are going home to meet?" asked the detective. "Like as not—*Murder*."

"I'm not afraid. It was a fair fight. Strickland was a robber and a rogue. I can prove that. I ought never to have gone off, only—"

"Only what?"

"Never mind. 'Anything I say will be used in evidence against me,'" quoted Robert. "I'm not going to open my mouth, genial James." And he smiled, and nodded his head wisely.

"You're a rare plucked 'un, to take it smiling, Robert Fawcitt."

"Well—I want some pluck. And I've got a head on my shoulders, too."

"I should say you had. The chase you gave me!"

"Look here, Lowe, do you mind telling me how you traced me?"

"Proud to do so now that you are nabbed," chuckled the detective, who, indeed, loved nothing better than to recite his own exploits, with a subdued bassoon accompaniment. "It will show you, though you've got a head on your shoulders, you are not quite so clever as you think for."

"No; it's you who are clever," said Robert, with artful flattery, "to have traced and apprehended me."

"I don't make no claim to anything beyond having done my duty with intelligence—a little intelligence," declared the detective, modestly.

"Well, drive ahead. I'm just longing to learn how you did it."

Whereupon Detective Lowe related his story, which may be synopsised as follows :

The "case" had been put into Lowe's hands directly Strickland had been discovered—dying, as was believed. Lowe reached Robert's private residence a little before ten on the morning after the murder, and interviewed Mrs. Strong. From her he learnt how Robert had reached home the night before, his head bandaged and his left arm in a sling, and, after ordering Mrs. Strong and the maid to bed, had disappeared.

From Mrs. Strong, Lowe obtained the address of Robert's brother Richard, and of his *fiancée* Miss Edith Carew. Going to the former's first, he was told he had started the previous evening for Jamaica. Searched his rooms and found a letter addressed to Robert, and left on the table to be posted, in which Richard told his brother he could not drop in the next morning to say good-bye, as he had determined to travel by the night mail to Southampton, and enclosing a cheque for £20, with which he requested Robert to buy a wedding-present for Edith. Enquiries made later in the day proved that Richard had taken his passage for Jamaica a fortnight previously. So "that cock wouldn't fight."

Lowe went next to Miss Carew's residence, and found she was missing and the household in the greatest alarm. Learnt that, on the previous evening, Miss Carew was to have gone to a dance with Robert, but at the last moment received a telegram from him saying he was delayed. So she had decided to go with a friend—Mrs. Hood. But Mrs. Hood

had not seen her, nor had Miss Carew attended the dance at all! End of first day: no clue discovered, only a strong suspicion that Miss Carew's disappearance was connected with Robert's.

Next morning the first ray of light. A telegram sent off from Liverpool arrived for Miss Edith Carew, conveying the message :

"All well; splendid steamer; carry out programme. Ever yours, Robert."

"Fool No. 1 to send that telegram," interpolated Detective Lowe.

"If you'd had a broken head, like I had," Robert pleaded, in excuse.

Liverpool generally meant America, and it was clear the fugitive had got out of the country. Up to Liverpool, to the telegraph-office from which the wire had been despatched.

Who sent it?

Answer: Couldn't say; came with a bunch from the pilot-station; get hundreds every day, in sheaves. Three big American liners sailed on the day inquired about, besides half-a-dozen other steamers; and every one of them sent off ten, fifty, a hundred, two hundred, five hundred telegrams of farewell by pilot. Clue dried up. Went all round the shipping-offices, searching passenger-lists, and asking for an individual who had booked a passage at the last moment. Couldn't hear of any; but picked out all the likely names, and cabled to the various ports to have suspected men watched.

"You certainly stole away very clever," interpolated Genial James.

Took up Miss Carew's track. Found some of her clothes and her travelling-bag were missing. Alice, the maid, swore they were in the house at the time Miss Carew started for the ball. How did she take them away? Alice had not sat up for her; she

had got a latch-key and could let herself in. Must have come back and done so, for there was the ball-dress she had gone to the dance in, bundled away in one of the drawers! Score No. 1. Instituted inquiries about her, but no results. Hardly likely to be after she had procured three clear days in which to leave the country.

"You was a clever pair," confessed Detective Lowe, with a retrospective expression on his face. "Real clever."

And then luck—sheer luck! A cablegram was received at Scotland Yard from Algiers, saying it was suspected that a passenger known on board the *Thessaly* as Darcy Barrington, bound for Port Said, was Robert Fawcitt. His head was bandaged, his left arm carried in a sling; he kept himself shut up in his cabin. Gave a description of him.

"And a good description, too," declared Lowe, taking a calm and calculating survey of his prisoner.

"Who sent that telegram?" asked Robert.

"Ah, that I can't tell you, for we never found out. I suppose the man thought, if he had made a mistake, he might find himself in a mess. It is a serious thing to suggest to the police that a fellow-passenger on board a passenger-steamer is a murderer!"

Robert nodded his head in acquiescence.

"All the same, I think I know who it was," he said.

"Whom do you suspect? My word, I'd like to know, if only to give him a 'Thank you.'"

But Robert would not tell.

"Will be used against me," he quoted.

"Fool No. 2," observed Lowe, "to let that man find out."

"We can't all be wise, Jimmy; *you* oughtn't to grumble, anyhow!"

"I oughtn't, Robert Fawcitt. It was only just to shew you you wasn't *perfect* clever."

Up to Liverpool again. Found a Mr. Darcy Barrington and two ladies had booked a passage for Port Said *two days before the attack on Strickland*. Shipping clerk remembered Barrington had a bandaged head and arm in a sling when he went aboard. No ladies went with him, because their agent, at the last moment, was told there were two empty berths.

"Now how did you get that ticket might I ask, Robert Fawcitt?" asked the detective much puzzled. "Had you premeditated the murder and taken it in advance. And who was the third lady? I'm most curious about this lot. 'Twas uncommon clever!"

"That will come out at the trial. You must wait a wee, Lowe."

Things came easy now. Continental Express to Port Said. Only to learn that Darcy Barrington had not arrived there, having left the *Thessaly* unexpectedly at Algiers.

"Seeing that you suspected someone of having spotted you I suppose that was the reason of your quitting?" queried the detective.

"Not at all. It was always my intention to leave the *Thessaly* at Algiers. Only I didn't shout it out from the bridge."

Off to Algiers; picked up scent, and carried it to Gibraltar. Red hot there. Came across a guide who called himself Don Quixote. Seemed to have a spite against you. Said you bilked him of five pounds. But it was a stroke of genius to take the name of Strickland. Only genius comes to grief sometimes. Soon found you had sneaked off by the *Humber Maid* after booking a passage on the P. and O. Mail Steamer.

"There were moments," admitted Detective Lowe, reflectively, "when I gave you credit for being

the cleverest and most daring rogue I have ever tracked."

"You compliment me," confessed Robert, with a touching smile and an ambiguous wink.

Back to Port Said, where they were on the look out for "Mrs. Barrington," expected overland from England. Made sure that Miss Carew was coming to join you "as per programme" in your Liverpool telegram to her. And here the news was received of the sinking of the *Humber Maid* in the Red Sea, with several of her crew lost, and you might have floored Lowe with a duster.

She had been sunk by the *Flintshire*, which steamer was herself so badly damaged that they had to run her ashore. Consequently it was more than a fortnight before the survivors reached Port Said. Of course waited there to question them—one was taken to hospital. Lowe went to see him. It was General Faloon suffering from shock and a fractured ear drum. Then it all came out and Lowe knew that Robert Bolt was his man.

"For directly I mentioned your name 'Fawcitt' to him, he cried out that that was the very name you had once signed to a wine card—which was Fool Number Three."

Robert's face was a study. "Fool Number Three," he ruefully admitted.

A day or two later the Indian papers arrived, and here was news! Mr. Bolt and two lady passengers saved from the *Humber Maid* in an open boat, and columns full of his brave conduct.

"I tell you, Robert Fawcitt, I felt a bit sorry for you then, I did. Couldn't help it when I read how handsome you had acted. But I'm afraid you're a bit of streaky bacon. The worst often is. What about that poor lady, Miss Carew? You get engaged to this young girl you save from the wreck. But I

don't see no discharge from the t'other one. However that's your private business, and no breaking the law except Breach of Marriage, which is civil not criminal, and out of my line accordingly. And now you knows all. And I think you'll allow it was a smart bit of scenting and a clever kill at the end."

"I give you every credit," said Robert, who had resented the reference to Edith. "And now I'll turn in."

And never another word would he exchange on the subject.

Before the end of the voyage Robert's courageous attitude had won over Detective Lowe, who contrasted him very flatteringly with the hung murderer who might have been taken for his brother on the passage home from South America. And it did more, for it filled him with compassion as well as admiration for his captive.

"I don't understand you," he often said, "you don't seem to realise what is hanging over your head. See here, Robert Fawcitt, I'll give you a bit of advice. Engage the best solicitor and counsel that money can procure. I'll recommend the right ones."

"I'm going to defend myself," said Robert.

"Defend yourself! Why, you're stark staring mad to dream of such a thing."

"Strickland wasn't dead when we last heard at Suez. He may not be dead yet. *It isn't murder till he dies.* He mayn't die till after the trial. Then it won't be murder at all."

Detective Lowe wrung his hands in agitated apprehension. "For God's sake, Robert Fawcitt, don't be a fool. Them sort of arguments is no good whatever when a man's life is in question. I tell you there's no hope for Strickland. He may go out at any moment, like the puff of a candle. If he'd been anywhere except the best hospital in London, with

the cleverest surgeons attending him *and interested in his case*, he'd have been dead months ago. You know what the Suez telegram said: "Precisely the same state. May die any moment. Marvellous he should have held out so long." Think of his dying—not of his living. What's a little money compared to your life, or even to your liberty for seven—ten—fourteen years. It's a black case against you. I know all the details. If you are such a fool as to defend yourself, why—dash it all!—no one will listen to you!"

"Won't they?" said Robert, with a queer look of determination in his resolute jaw. "I bet you, genial Jimmy, I'll make one speech they'll listen to —open-mouthed!"

* * * * *

Robert held to his resolve, and absolutely refused to avail himself of any legal assistance, and when on a gloomy February morning he was placed in the dock at Bow Street, and the rumour went round that the prisoner was defending himself, the comment was:

"Well, he *is* a fool!"

The charge was read out. It remained one of "attempted" murder, for the victim still lingered in his comatose condition. Robert stood in the dock, his hands in his pockets, his head held high, his grey eyes bright and fearless, and on his handsome, clean shaven face an expression that was almost proud in its defiance and contempt of the gapers who had come to see him tried.

The clerk began to note down the formal particulars—"Name, Robert Fawcitt," he murmured in a mechanical tone of voice, which followed his pen.

"Pardon me," corrected the prisoner in the dock. "You are mistaken. I am not *Robert Fawcitt*. He is my brother. My name is—Richard Fawcitt!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CLAIM OF BLOOD.

SELDOM has an announcement in a Court of Law created such a sensation as the astounding revelation made by Richard Fawcitt.

At first he was disbelieved, notwithstanding his calm, confident air. The clerk glanced up in perplexity to the magistrate; the magistrate was looking in equal perplexity at Dick. A babel of tongues was heard buzzing in the well of the Court, and the face of Detective Lowe was a study of mixed passions and pathos, beginning with amazement and incredulity, and lapsing through suspicion, indignation and defeat into humiliation.

“ You deny you are Robert Fawcitt ? ” asked the magistrate at last.

“ I am Richard, more commonly known as Dick Fawcitt.”

“ Call some witnesses, they’ll soon decide,” came the order.

Two of the clerks of the late firm of Fawcitt & Strickland were hurriedly brought into court, and asked to identify the prisoner at the bar.

They looked at him, shook their heads, and said he was not their master.

“ Sergeant Lowe, what does this mean ? ” asked the magistrate. “ How do you come to have apprehended the wrong man ? ”

And the glib detective who had cut such a shine in the Bombay police-court, cut a very different one at Bow Street.

"All I can tell your Worship is that he came with me as quiet as a lamb. He never disputed the warrant."

The magistrate turned to Dick, "What have you to say, sir?"

"Candidly, I would rather not say anything."

"Where is your brother, Robert Fawcitt?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"When did you last see him?"

"The day before I left England."

"Before or after the murder?"

Dick made no reply, and then Sergeant Lowe burst out in a voice of accepted revelation, "I see it! I see it! He laid a false track to enable his brother to escape! He's juggled with the law."

The magistrate held a consultation with his clerk, and referred to several law books. "Sergeant Lowe, go into the witness-box," he said at length.

The Sergeant stepped briskly in, saluted the Court, and prepared himself for examination. It was a long and close one conducted by the magistrate himself, and brought out all the salient facts, especially those of the bandaged head and arm in sling, which went to prove that Dick had deliberately personated his brother.

The Magistrate turned to Dick. "It is very clear," he said, "that you entered into a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice. It is very clear that by your action you have enabled your brother to escape from the law. What have you to urge against my issuing a warrant against you on that charge?"

The truth had been made so plain that it was useless for Dick to attempt to deny it. He took a bolder course.

"I admit the charge," he said. "My brother appealed to me. He was too ill to escape."

"Where did you see him?"

"I refuse to say. He sent Miss Carew for me."

"And you say you don't know where he is?"

"If I had known where he was I should have resisted arrest at Bombay. It was to give him more time to escape that I submitted."

"You admit that! Do you not see you have done a most atrocious act? Apart from the legal aspect, where is your sense of morality?"

"Strickland is not dead," said Dick. "There is a moral limit."

"What do you mean? Are you juggling with words now?"

"Whilst Strickland was alive my standard of morality allowed me to act as I have done. Had he died—had I *known* of his death—well, I cannot answer a hypothetical question, but perhaps I should have acted differently. Whilst he was alive I did not feel guilty of passing the moral limit which conscience imposed upon my actions."

"You have forgotten the legal obligation of the citizen."

"The claim of a brother's blood is stronger than the claim of the law."

"But not greater than the power of the law. You say your brother was in no condition to escape. I will give you a chance of partly purging your crime. Where did you last see him?"

"That I will never tell you," said Dick, resolutely. "Thank God I left him in good hands, in hands that have been successful in safeguarding him. For the sake of the noble woman who has linked her lot to his, I hold my peace. They are out of your reach now, of that I am certain."

"You are taking a very foolish course—a very

wrong course," said the magistrate severely. " You talk of the Claim of Blood. But there is another Claim of Blood—the Claim of Blood that is shed wrongfully."

" I know the facts of the assault," said Dick. " My brother told me, and I believe his version. Strickland was the murderer in intention, my poor brother only a murderer by accident."

" Why did he seek to escape if that is so ? " asked the magistrate.

" He did so very much against my advice. There was strong circumstantial evidence against him, which he could not disprove. I wished him to face it out, but there were influences stronger than mine."

" Which makes your conduct all the worse. It was your duty to assist the law, especially with the knowledge of those facts. You impeded it ; you not merely connived at your brother's escape, but actually made yourself the instrument of it. Fortunately the law can punish you. I shall commit you on the lesser charge of conspiracy, but if Mr. Strickland dies, you will be charged with being an accessory to murder, after the fact. I remand you for a week. And my last words of warning to you are that you will be very ill-advised if you continue in your contempt. Mr. Strickland's life hangs on a thread ; if you purge yourself before his death, you may escape the graver charge. If you do not—the law is the law, and holds an accessory to murder equally guilty with the murderer. Remove the prisoner ! "

And Dick was led away to the cells, with the last ominous words of the magistrate ringing in his ears in startling revelation.

Left to himself Dick (as we must now call him) had plenty of leisure to contemplate his condition in the light of the new legal circumstances that had been revealed. The tables were turned, and he was

now the man amazed and shocked. Never had he suspected this! An accessory to murder after the fact held equally guilty with the murderer! He was dazed at the damning intelligence, and as he sat in his prison-cell there crept over him a sense of abandonment and hopelessness.

He recalled the incidents of that fatal night when, at Edith's entreaties—who had knelt to him, and bathed his hands with her tears, in her agonised appeal to him to save Robert—he had yielded. Robert's last cry echoed in his ears—"I can't do it!"—the cry of utter physical collapse, that precluded any effort to escape. He saw him, in his mind's eye, lying senseless on the couch and Edith wailing over him. All the scene arose before him. He saw himself carrying Robert in his arms to the empty flat upstairs belonging to Armstrong and laying him on the bed, groaning and insensible. He saw himself stocking the room with such scanty provisions as remained in his own chambers, whilst Edith applied herself to attending to Robert, with the splendid fortitude and noble devotion of her fine character. Then he saw himself returning to his flat, giving the cautious final touches that might indicate its evacuation by its master; and, to foil the track, writing a letter to Robert, enclosing a cheque for a wedding-present to Edith, and intimating his intention to leave for Southampton that night. He saw himself carefully collecting and burning the hair which he had cut off Robert's cheeks and chin when shaving him, so that they might afford no clue; and he again went through that last hurried consultation with Edith when they settled their final plans. Edith was not to go home; Dick was to telegraph a message from Liverpool that would put the detectives on the wrong scent. Furthermore, he was to provide Edith with a letter to

the housekeeper at the Flats, saying that Dick had let his floor to "Mr. and Mrs. Conway," and that they would take possession in a few days, Mr. Conway having met with an accident which would prevent them coming in the day after Dick left, as had been their intention. He saw himself writing this letter, which was to secure Edith and Robert a sanctuary after the detectives had paid their anticipated visit to Dick's flat, to see if he could give any information about his brother. Then he saw himself saying good-bye to Robert, who had come round, and, whilst Edith was out of the room, calling on him to remember the sacrifice she was making for him and to try and be worthy of it. And then—good-bye, with Edith's blessings breathing after him as he descended the stairs dressed, disguised, and equipped to personate Robert.

And from that day, until he received Edith's telegram at Gungaram, never a word had reached him from her or Robert. Why? The explanation was very simple. Her message had elucidated the mystery. It ran :

"In urgent danger still, but hope to escape next week. Everything explained in letters to Richard Lock, care of Cook's, Bombay."

There it was in a nutshell. In assuming Robert's identity, Dick had also assumed his alias as "Robert Bolt," whilst Robert and Edith had written to him as "Richard Lock," the name that Dick had selected for himself when correspondence was to pass between them!

All was simple and self-evident now—but the prison-walls encompassed Dick, and Fate had decided that his self-sacrifice should not defeat the ends of justice.

And now, what was he to do? His full duty towards Edith and Robert had been accomplished;

his promise to keep *perdu* until he heard definitely from them that their escape was secured, was fulfilled. He had no reason to doubt that they were safe. Did that promise still bind him?

There was yet time to purge his contempt in part. The magistrate had solemnly called upon him to do so. All that he had to say was that Edith and Robert had found refuge, first in Armstrong's flat, subsequently in Dick's.

But—would it put the detectives on his brother's track? Would it negative all that he had done and suffered to save Robert?

He reflected. If Edith and Robert had managed to escape, it must have been very recently. Her cablegram to him spoke of "urgent danger." Suppose they had not got off? Suppose "Mr. and Mrs. Conway" were still in hiding in his flat? Oh, if he could only communicate with them and find out *for certain*!

He racked his brains to try and discover a way of doing so. Should he trust Detective Lowe? Lowe was a good fellow; and now that Dick had been proved innocent of the attack on Strickland, he felt sure, despite the Sergeant's mortification at the mare's nest he had been led into, that his sympathies would be with Dick. On the other hand, Lowe was a man with a stern and rigid sense of duty. Considering it over, Dick felt it would be too dangerous to rely on his sympathy as against his duty.

And yet, if he could only exhibit some earnest of his desire to purge his contempt! His present condition was horrible to contemplate! If Strickland died—but he must not die—he must not die and make Robert a murderer! And if he survived? Well, even then it meant a definite term of imprisonment for conspiracy. Oh, it was a cruel tangle, a cruel temptation.

A hundred considerations were urging him to save himself. There was sweet little Lily, ever first and foremost in his mind. Was she to be sacrificed to this cursed tangle he had got himself into? Had she not suffered enough in her young life? She was now left friendless and forlorn; he was her natural, her proper guardian. She loved him—his eyes dimmed as he remembered a thousand little incidents which showed how she loved him. Was Lily to be sacrificed to his promise to Edith? Was her life to be blighted? Was his pledged word to be carried to its ultimate conclusion at such a cost as that?

He thought it out; and then the doctrine of the Moral Limit swayed him. His word was pledged; what he had promised, that must he perform. The claim of blood was first; and, since Edith had sacrificed herself as she had done, he was bound in duty and honour to do the same.

And that was the resolution he came to in his prison-cell; and, having come to it, he was one of that class of men whom nothing could shake.

But there were instruments at work to shake him. In the first place a lawyer, who said he had been instructed to undertake Robert's defence, and yet would not reveal the name of his principals. That was a curious thing, and it did not take Dick long to recognise that the mysterious persons instructing him could only be Edith and Robert. A proof that they were still in London—that Edith conceived Robert's danger to be far greater than Dick's, and that consequently she had come to the decision to try and get him off by means of a clever advocate. It made the acceptance of the offer easy, and Dick found himself defended by the shrewdest solicitor and the craftiest Criminal Counsel in London!

The second instrument at work to shake him was—Detective Lowe! He had the entrée of Dick's prison-cell, and the day after his remand came to see him.

"Mr. Fawcitt," he said, "you bamboozled me, and have made me the fool of the Force and the laughing-stock of Scotland Yard. Notwithstanding, I'm proud to shake hands with you. I've never known a man do what you've done, and do it so brave and cool. And if I come here to implore you to reflect, it's not because I want to apprehend your brother—I'd sooner a hundred times he escaped, after what you have suffered!—but because I wish to see you save yourself from a great danger. I can't bear to think of you going to penal servitude. I wish I had you in charge again! By my soul, Mr. Fawcitt, *you should escape*—even if I chanced my pension for it! And now the escape is in your own hands. For God's sake, sir, grasp the chance!"

But Dick shook his head.

"I promised my brother and Miss Carew to be true to my trust. I have no proof that they are beyond danger. I am not going to do or say anything that might betray them. I must act according to my lights. The claim of blood is stronger than the command of the law. I should be a cur if I tried to save myself at their expense."

"Look here, sir," whispered Lowe, "will you trust me? Just say enough to get yourself out of this scrape, and leave it to me. If it's possible to miss finding your brother I'll make a miss of it!"

"You couldn't if I opened my mouth. And if you did, it would be bad for your prospects in the Force, Lowe. I'm not going to ruin you to save my skin."

"They'll make it seven years, Mr. Fawcitt. Think again! For your own sake, I beg of you to be just to yourself."

"Don't tempt me, Lowe. I've run straight so far. You wouldn't have me turn crooked and coward at the last?"

"You *couldn't*, sir," said Lowe, with conviction.

* * * * *

The day of the adjourned hearing arrived, and Dick was driven to Bow Street in the "Black Maria." As he descended he caught sight of Lowe, whose face was seamed with care and sorrow. He stepped up to Dick and whispered in his ear :

"Dreadful news, Mr. Fawcitt. Worse than the worst! Strickland is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Dick, blankly. "Then it's murder."

"And—and—" Lowe hesitated; and then, with an effort, as if it were kinder to speak, no matter how painful, added: "I've seen the charge-sheet, and your brother and Miss Carew are included in it. God knows how or when, but they've been apprehended!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAW ON THE SUBJECT.

AND then for the first time in the hurricane of disaster which had recently overtaken him, Dick broke down.

Edith and Robert arrested ! All his self-sacrifice wasted ! The concatenation was too cruel ! And, to crown all, it made Lily the sacrificial victim of this holocaust ! Truly the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune had marked Dick for their own.

With uneven steps he followed his warder to the room of detention, where he was kept waiting until his case could be heard. A thousand bitter thoughts surged in his bursting bosom. Oh, the pity of it—the unutterable pity of it all. The ruined hopes, the wrecked lives that could be traced back to that fatal weakness he had exhibited on the night Edith and Robert came to his rooms. If he had only acted the man then, and said, “This shall not be”—had only insisted on Robert surrendering himself, as any simpleton could have seen was the right course to pursue—all these horrors might have been averted.

And now Robert would be in the dock, charged with murder, and Edith and Dick as accessories after the fact ! The terror of it—the terror of it !

Twenty minutes later he was summoned. In the passage outside his cell he was brought face to face with Edith and Robert !

It was a dramatic moment. All three were thrilled with the tragedy in which they were actors, but the restraint of their situation, surrounded by strange, unsympathetic instruments of the law, prevented them from giving full exhibition to their feelings. Still, in the meeting of their eyes, in the working of their countenances, in the pallor of their cheeks, the shock that staggered them was evident, and could not have failed to touch the least observant.

"Edith!" cried Dick, "To see you here! How has it come to pass?"

"We surrendered, Dick," she answered, "directly we heard you had been arrested. Robert wished to do so long ago, but he has been so ill, and I persuaded him to defer it. And now——"

"Now it is—too late!" Dick added, in a tone of poignant grief and despair. "Oh, would that I had saved you!"

There was no time for the exchange of further words. A rude, stern voice bade them hurry on, and the next minute they found themselves in the dock, with all the eyes in the crowded police-court focussed on them.

The Magistrate looked at Dick, and there was a certain softening of his granite features, an expression that seemed to say, "You have only yourself to blame: I warned you at the last hearing that this might occur."

The Clerk called the case: "*The King versus Richard Fawcitt, Robert Fawcitt, and Edith Carew.*" Instantly the Crown Solicitor for the prosecution arose and notified that since the first hearing of the case against Richard Fawcitt the prisoners Robert Fawcitt (who had actually committed the crime) and Edith Carew had surrendered themselves to justice. And since their surrender, he went on, in a solemn voice, Septimus Strickland had died. The notifi-

cation of his death had only reached him on the previous evening, and the result was that the charge of "attempted murder" must now be extended to the graver charge of the capital offence. An inquest was to have been held on the victim yesterday, and the medical witnesses were *subpœnaed* to give their evidence in that Court to-day. They had not yet arrived, but were expected every minute. Perhaps his Worship would put back the case for a short time to permit of their attendance.

The Magistrate consulted with his clerk. "I see there are several witnesses to be examined, and the inquiry promises to extend to a considerable length. Under these circumstances I propose to begin the hearing. There is plenty of evidence to employ the Court, and I therefore call upon you to open your case."

Whereupon the Crown prosecutor arose and gave his preliminary address. With the deft skill of a lawyer he related the facts, touching on the salient points, and gradually drawing his net round the three persons in the dock. Seldom had such a romantic and daring story been unfolded in a police-court, and it held the public spellbound, whilst it was evident that a great wave of pity and admiration was created in favour of Dick and Edith.

When the Crown prosecutor had finished his opening speech there was a little buzz in anticipation of the medical evidence. But, strangely enough, the hospital doctors who had conducted the inquest had not arrived yet. The magistrate therefore determined to go on with some of the purely formal evidence.

Four clerks in the employ of the late firm of Fawcitt, Strickland & Co. gave evidence as to the identity of Robert, and the circumstances of the fatal day when Strickland had received his mortal wound. They were greatly agitated at having to

testify against their old employer, but his own actions and words left it impossible for them to say anything in his favour beyond that he was a good and kind employer.

All this time Dick's solicitor and counsel had been in earnest confabulation. They had made no objections to the somewhat informal procedure, for the medical evidence ought to have been taken first. But, owing to the intense interest which Strickland's peculiar case had created in professional circles, the inquest had been conducted by two of the greatest surgeons of the day, and out of respect for their illustrious reputations, allowances were made for their unpunctuality.

Next, Sergeant Lowe was called, but, just as he was stepping into the witness-box, there was the sound of hurried entry from one side of the court, and two elderly gentlemen entered. They were the medical witnesses, and one of them, with a courteous bow to the magistrate, apologised for being late, but they had been delayed at the Coroner's inquest, which had been protracted and only just concluded. The magistrate made a polite rejoinder and Sergeant Lowe was ordered to step back, and the great surgeon of St. Bartholomew's took his place in the witness-box.

A hush fell on the Court. The man who was going to testify was at the head of his profession. It was an altogether extraordinary thing that such a savant should have condescended to conduct an inquest, and it raised the public curiosity, for his name was one that carried a European reputation. Something in his grave and thoughtful manner, too, was calculated to arrest attention, and it was noticed he never once directed his glance to the three prisoners in the dock.

And then came the greatest sensation of the day.

Asked what was the cause of the death of Septimus Strickland, he replied, in briefest phrase :

“ Pneumonia.”

The Crown prosecutor fell back in his seat with surprise. Then, rising again, he asked :

“ Do you mean to say, Sir George, Septimus Strickland did not die from the effects of the injury to his brain which, I learn by the medical papers, made his case such a peculiarly interesting one ? ”

“ No. He died from natural causes. The post-mortem examination has disclosed that the diagnosis of the injury to his brain was incorrect, and it was possible, nay probable, that he would have survived to be an old man but for the attack of pneumonia which was the direct and only cause of his death. My colleague in court is ready to substantiate the professional opinion I have arrived at after a most careful and exhaustive examination. The actual injury to the brain from the blow received was slight: the real brain trouble, we found, was due to antecedent causes. The subject would probably have gone mad had his life been prolonged under ordinary circumstances and had he not suffered the injury to which we wrongly attributed his condition.”

Up jumped Dick’s counsel. “ In the face of this evidence, your Worship, I put it that there is no case against the accused.”

“ On the face of the medical evidence,” admitted the magistrate, “ there is nothing left for me but to order the discharge of the prisoners. But,” he added, in his most impressive tones, turning to Dick, “ I hope this will be a lesson to you, sir, to yield the law greater respect in the future than you have done on this occasion. And for you, sir,” turning to Robert, “ you may consider that you have had a quite providential and, I fear, unmerited escape from the position in which you placed yourself in a

moment of passion. Let this be a warning to you, too. The prisoners are discharged!"

Thus terminated one of the most sensational cases that have ever been tried in that home of sensation—the Bow Street Police-court. The extraordinary dénouement gave the most unqualified satisfaction to the spectators in Court, and a large crowd collected outside to cheer Dick and Edith as they drove away; and, in the echoes of the applause which followed them, Robert escaped any public demonstration, and got off perhaps more easily than he deserved.

"Wonderful!" cried Dick, as the cab moved slowly down towards Wellington Circus. "The Age of Miracles is not passed."

"You dearest and best Dick!" cried Edith. "Oh, how I love you!"

"God bless you, Dick," whispered Robert, in a broken voice. "I am not worthy to be your brother."

"Hush," cried Edith, laying her hand gently on Robert's arm. "He has been very ill, Dick. At death's door. He did not know what he was doing that night. Ten minutes after you left, he lost his senses. Brain fever followed—the result of violent concussion of the brain. For six weeks he was not master of his thoughts. You can make allowances for that night, Dick, can't you?"

"You needn't ask that question, Edith. There are no 'allowances' necessary between Bob and me, are there, old fellow?"

And Robert, for reply, extended his hand to Dick, and wrung his affectionately. "God bless you, dear Dick," was all he said. But an ocean of gratitude went out in those simple words.

And then a little silence fell on these three, each chastened with their own thoughts, each too happy

to speak. Nor was it broken until the cab drew up at Dick's old flat.

"What a happy home-coming!" cried Dick, as he leaped out and helped, first Edith to alight, and then Robert, who was still very weak and frail.

They went upstairs to his old familiar rooms, and the first thing Edith did when they were safe inside was to fling her arms round Dick and kiss him.

"Oh, Dick! Dick!" she cried, with joyful tears in her eyes. "How miserable I was this morning, and how happy I am now. I could never have believed so much delight and agony could be compressed between one sunrise and sunset!"

"Come," said Dick, as he drew chairs to the fire, "we have lots of news to exchange, and we must lose no time, because I am leaving for India to-morrow."

"Leaving for India? Why?" exclaimed Edith and Robert in the greatest amazement.

"To bring my fiancée home. And you two must defer your wedding till I can join in the occasion, and do my share."

"You are engaged to be married, Dick! Oh, do tell me—is she dark or fair?"

"Fair."

"Short or tall?"

"Short."

"Well I never!" cried Edith. "I couldn't have believed it. How I shall love her! That's the very best news I've heard to-day. Now do tell me all—all about it."

"On one condition," answered Dick. "I'll give you a true and surprising account of my wonderful adventures if you'll do the same concerning yours."

"Why, of course I will," said Edith. "I wonder whose will prove the most dreadful. Bob and I

have gone through a black time, Dick. It was only our love for one another that enabled us to keep up."

"And I have gone through a tragic time, too," said Dick, gravely, "and it was only the love of my little girl that kept me going this last month. But come—you shall hear and judge for yourself."

And with Edith and Robert listening in rapt attention he told them the story of the last four months, very much as it has been told in these pages—only more briskly.

And when he came to an end, "Dick," said Edith, "I'm a little bit jealous of Lily, you know. You won't have any love left for your poor sister, I'm afraid."

"Oh, won't I?" cried Dick. "You are going to be Bob's wife, and he'll be punching my head if I don't love you."

And Robert smiled as happily and contentedly as any man could do.

"And now," said Dick, "it's your turn to tell me your story, Edith. I'm all impatience to hear it."

"Then I'll gratify your curiosity," said Edith, and related the following story, which, for the convenience of the reader, has been cast into a narrative form, and all interruptions from Dick and Robert sternly eliminated.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EDITH'S STORY.

AFTER you left the flat, Dick, at one o'clock that morning, and the sleepy old housekeeper, whom you astonished with your sudden resolve to catch the night mail, had gone to bed, I set myself to work to make poor Robert as comfortable as possible in Mr. Armstrong's flat upstairs. He was in just the same half-dazed state as when you left, only he kept starting up every now and then declaring he must "fly at once" and imploring me to assist him to get away. It was a terrible night and I do not know how I ever got through it. When he seemed to be getting more and more restless I determined to try the effect of the morphia which you left with me, and administered a strong dose, and that sent him into a deep slumber to my infinite relief and rest, for I was by that time nearly worn out myself, and women are such cowards at four o'clock in the morning! Had he not yielded to the narcotic it was my intention to inform the housekeeper at six, and let Fate take its own course with us.

But with a couple of hours' sleep, and the knowledge of the power that the drug had over Robert, I awakened and rose a new and more determined woman. At least Fate should come to us, I decided: we would not go a-seeking it. And I

thought of you, Dick, and what you had done for us, and that gave me courage.

Notwithstanding, I lived in terror all the next day, for I heard men tramping about in your flat underneath, and knew they were the detectives and police who you said would be sure to come; in terror, too, of Robert's awaking and calling out, or making some noise to indicate that there was someone in what was supposed to be an empty flat. Happily the police did not trouble us long; they left in about a couple of hours, taking the letter which you had concocted and laid on the table as if intended for Robert. As for him, poor fellow, he remained in the same state all day, and I could only give him some tea without any milk, and a little brandy from time to time. I did my best to dress the dreadful wound on his head, of which he complained cruelly. But he was so good and patient, suffered such pain, both mental and physical, that it nearly broke me down to see how he suffered. And so we got through the day—the longest day I have ever lived, and evening found me with a better spirit to face the morrow.

I dared not move out that night, though I was most anxious to get to a chemist's and procure some healing ointment for Robert's wound. But I was too nervous; I had not got the necessary pluck or confidence in myself, and I acted like a—coward! But then, Dick, I'm only a woman, and all women aren't constituted like your splendid little heroine Lily!

(Dick bowed gravely. "Your sister will never admit that, dear Edith," he said, "nor will I. Your heroism in the desperate and lonely circumstances in which you were placed places you on a pedestal of your own.")

The third day I recognised that Robert was urgently in need of medical aid. He was in a high fever, and I feared he might become delirious, and

cry out. Watching my opportunity I stole away in the dusk of the winter's evening and got safely back with medicine and a strong opiate which the chemist recommended as safer to administer than morphia, and with some food. The former gave Robert a little relief, and the opiate had a more benevolent effect, though one as salutary as the morphia, and rendered him somnolent all day, but without any renewal of the restlessness. And the morning and the evening were the third day!

All that night I kept thinking out plans how we could establish ourselves in a less perilous position. I had your letter for "Mr. and Mrs. Conway," but the difficulty was to get Robert out of the building unseen, and then back into it as a stranger. Something had to be done. Suddenly an inspiration came to me. There was my old nurse, Mrs. Pugh, a kind, simple woman who can neither read nor write. She had always been devoted to me, and I knew I could trust her with my life twenty times over. I determined to seek her aid, and early that morning crept out and called upon her, told her I had quarrelled with my Aunt and was going to live in a flat by myself, and would she come and "do for me." Poor thing, she was a little scandalised at first, but she could deny me nothing, and being in very straitened circumstances, and loving me almost as much as if I were her own child, the temptation of the offer proved irresistible.

Then I did a bold thing—I confided to her the secret about Robert, but making up a story that he had gone bankrupt (which was the cause of my quarrel with my Aunt) and had met with a dreadful accident, and was so poor that he could not afford medical attendance. Also that his creditors were after him, and he must hide, and I stormed her pity and sympathy by describing his helpless and friendless

condition. Well, Dick, you know I have a coaxing way about me, and I had no difficulty in working upon Mrs. Pugh's kind heart, and knew she would do anything and everything for me, and keep as silent as the grave. What that meant to me you can imagine; the comfort it was to have an elderly woman in the house, to assist me and give me her countenance!

Next—straight from Mrs. Pugh's—I returned boldly to the flat, rang up the housekeeper and gave him the letter you provided me with, saying you had rented the flat to me for as long as I desired to occupy it, and asking for the key. I made him show me over, asked the usual questions, found fault with no end of things in the most approved of inquiring-tenant's style, and arranged to enter into residence the next day with my husband, Mr. Conway, if he were well enough to be moved, explaining that he had been laid up by an accident. Then I demanded and obtained the latch-key of the front door (though of course I had the one you gave me in my pocket), and with this "Open Sesame" legitimately at my disposal I began to see an end to my present horrible difficulties.

Then, as if by an afterthought, I said I would take the measure of the rooms to see if the extra furniture I wished to introduce would fit them—they were so shockingly furnished! I apologise, Dick, but I actually complained that I couldn't live in such a hovel of a place! It all served to impress the house-keeper, and made it easy for me to get rid of him, after satisfying him that I had now taken possession and was mistress of the flat. I added that I would let myself out and he need not trouble.

As soon as it was safe I returned to Robert upstairs, and to my joy he seemed a little better. I explained to him what I had planned. He seemed

to understand it with difficulty, but he had become very trustful of me during these last three days, and my hand upon his forehead, stroking and soothing it, had a pacifying effect.

Early the next morning I gave him another strong opiate, and stole out before the housekeeper was up or anyone stirring, and walked to Mrs. Pugh's. There I coached her up how she was to act, and at ten o'clock we drove back to the flat and were received with open arms and the most respectful welcome by the housekeeper and his wife. Presently I sent him out on an errand, and sent his wife to make some household purchases for me, promising that Mrs. Pugh should attend to the door in their absence. That was our opportunity, and nurse and I brought Robert down from above, and had him comfortably in your bed within ten minutes. When the housekeeper returned I mentioned the fact of his arrival in such a casual way that it elicited no surprise, only many protestations of regret that the poor gentleman had been overtaken with a fainting fit and obliged to retire to his bed. And so the emigration I had most dreaded was successfully accomplished.

But I was still anxious about the police. Suppose they called again? Of course I kept very quiet, never going out except after dark, and devoting myself solely to nursing Robert, for whom I now summoned medical assistance. Dr. Milsom's kindness I shall never forget, nor the skill with which he treated my poor darling. He blamed me very much for not having called him in before, saying that at an earlier stage he might have done much to ward off the illness of which there were now ominous signs. His prediction proved true, and there was no escape from the brain fever which followed.

Now the housekeeper, Johnson, as you must know, Dick, was an awful gossip, and with Dr.

Milsom coming twice and thrice a day there was no knowing to what extent his tongue might not clack, and how much curiosity he might not raise in the other tenants in the building. Distressed at this, the idea occurred to me of trying to get rid of the housekeeper, and installing Mrs. Pugh's son in his place! I sent nurse to gossip with Mrs. Johnson, and soon discovered that her husband's one ambition in life was to set up as a small grocer, and that he had £60 saved towards buying a business, which he was determined to do so soon as he could command a hundred pounds. I had all the money which you left us so thoughtfully, you dear Dick, when you took away Mr. Strickland's circular notes and those foreign drafts, and you may be sure I did not hesitate to spend £40, and advanced it, free of interest, on the condition that Johnson recommended young Pugh for the post, and made way for him within three days. Under ordinary circumstances the short time I allowed for the transaction might have excited suspicion, but, as it happened, it was not short enough for Johnson, who had his eye on a business that was just going to be snapped up by another person. Result, the thing was done in forty-eight hours, and there I was with Mrs. Pugh attending on me in the flat, and her son guarding the front door against dangers!

I now felt comparatively safe, and if it had not been for Robert's condition I should have been happy. But he was getting worse and worse every day, and Dr. Milsom was hinting at the necessity of getting in a professional nurse. That was more than I could contemplate complacently. It was necessary for us to remain *perdu*, to be prepared for all eventualities, even for a sudden flight in case of sudden danger. We wanted no nurse to hamper us. So I consented to Mrs. Pugh helping me more than she had done,

and we shared the nursing between us, and I called her Mrs. Box and she called me Miss Cox because one of us was always thinking of going to bed when the other was thinking of getting up, and what with changing the sheets and bedding each time I tell you, Dick, it was occasionally exasperating.

Happily my fears about the police were groundless, they never called again, and we remained in splendid isolation except for Dr. Milsom's visits twice daily. Poor, poor Robert, he grew worse and worse, his raving delirium was too dreadful, and there were times when I thought I should go mad myself, hearing and seeing all the dreadful sounds and sights of his sick chamber. And what gave me frightful trouble was Dr. Milsom's suspicions.

"Your husband," he would say, "has something on his mind. He can't get rid of it. What is it? Tell me? Speak of it in front of him. It may lead him to confide in me, and then we shall cure him."

And all I could answer was, "He has money troubles. He won't speak to anyone about them—not even to me." And all the time my heart was starting for fear that in his raging delirium Robert would reveal to Dr. Milsom the secret that tortured his brain.

At last there came a little ray of relief. Your letter from Gibraltar reached me, and my anxiety about you was eased. I wrote you such a long letter to Port Said—to "Richard Lock," of course—and told you everything, but in a way which nobody could have made head or tail of if the letter had miscarried. Then I had another dreary three weeks to wait before I got your Port Said letter—oh, so dreary, despatched from the stokehole, you said, and never explained why! You ought to have explained, Dick. I got worrying over why you should write

from the stokehole, and was in that state of mind which invested everything unusual with danger !

When your Port Said letter arrived Robert was in a dreadful state. The fever had left him, but he was so fearfully weak that the doctor warned me not to harbour hope. But he was conscious, and that was my great blessing. I had to nurse him and wait on him like a baby, and oh, Dick, it was pitiful, pitiful to see a strong, active, fine man brought to that helpless pass.

One day Dr. Milsom told me he feared the end was approaching. You can understand what that meant for me, who had learnt in his illness to love him a thousand times more than ever I did before. He was so weak and helpless—he seemed my very, very own to support and win back to life again. And now Dr. Milsom bade me prepare for the worst.

I couldn't help it, Dick, but in that black, hopeless hour I thought of myself. It was a foolish idea, but I wanted—I wanted to be able to claim him for my own if—if he died. I was weak and overwrought, and that evening, after Dr. Milsom left, I broke down, and on my knees by the side of my darling's bed, I begged him to marry me, and make me his own.

It agitated him dreadfully, but, at the same time, it served to rouse him. I cannot explain how or why, but it got him over the crisis. Desperately ill and weak as he was, he rose above his frailty, and told me, with fond words and endearments I cannot repeat, that though he was mine body and soul, he would never marry me, even were he well and strong, without your sanction.

“ I promised Dick,” he murmured, “ I would be a true man to you, Edith. I must be purged of my crime, or Dick must give his consent to my marrying, before I bind you to my wrecked life.”

And then he burst into a flood of tears, and that, Dick, was, I think, the actual crisis of his illness, for, exhausted with the effort, he fell into a deep sleep that lasted for fourteen hours, and when Dr. Milsom came the next morning he made my heart leap within me with thankfulness and gratitude, when he said :

“ He is better. He will recover. It is marvelous ! ”

CHAPTER XXVII.

EDITH'S STORY INTERRUPTED.

EDITH came to a pause in her story, and Robert, with touching gratitude in his expression, looked lovingly at her.

"What should we do without our womenfolk, Bob?" asked his brother, with intent to dispel the temporary touch of solemnity that had descended on the little party.

"Ah, what!" echoed Robert.

And then Edith, with a little shiver, as if to dismiss the poignant recollection, continued her story.

I will not enter into a detailed description of the next month. Robert grew better and better; but, with returning strength of body and mind, I could see there was some secret trouble worrying him.

"What is it?" I asked him one day.

And he answered, "It's about Dick. Driven from England through my folly and madness. I want to give myself up. I can't stand the thought of Dick hiding in the far corners of the earth and carrying my crime on his shoulders."

"Wait a little," I begged him, "until you are stronger, Robert. Dick would wish you to wait. He would not have you run the risk of surrendering in your present state of health. Wait just a little."

And, grudgingly, he consented to wait—just because of me.

At the end of January there came an excitement in our quiet lives. Mr. Armstrong suddenly returned! You may judge what a surprise it was to me when I say that I had put off and put off tidying up his rooms, and they showed more than signs of having been occupied! He was in a terrible rage, and first of all demanded an explanation of me! His manner was not courteous, and it nettled me, so that we actually came to constrained language if not to high words. And the man hated me, because I can sometimes say very cutting things, as you know, Dick, and I did!

And was punished for it! For two days after he came there arrived a foreign telegram for "John Lock, care of A. Armstrong, Esq." Now, I had arranged with the postman to deliver John Lock's letters to me—stupid of me, wasn't it, not to infer from you using that name that you had adopted "Robert Bolt?" and I had omitted to tell young Pugh. The telegraph boy of course knew nothing of this arrangement, and Pugh sent him up to Mr. Armstrong's flat, and here was a pretty to-do! I heard arguing on the landing upstairs, and being always on the *qui vive* I listened. Conceive my dismay when I found out that the subject of the argument was—Who was John Lock, and why were his telegrams sent to the care of Mr. Armstrong?

Of course I had to have that telegram, and when I heard Mr. Armstrong say, "Well, I'll keep it on my mantelpiece and give it to Mr. John Lock when he calls for it," I was all of a tremble. I knew it must be important—a telegram is always important to a woman. How was I to get it!

I did the only thing I could do, went straight up to Mr. Armstrong's flat, said I had heard him speaking

about a telegram for Mr. John Lock, and that it should have been delivered to me.

Then that odious man turned on me and said, with horrid truth, "So you add eavesdropping to your other accomplishments, Mrs. Conway?"

I tried to make out it was an accident, but he was not to be taken in. "I think Mr. Richard Fawcitt has got some very queer tenants," he observed, impertinently, "and I believe you and your husband are the people who occupied my flat."

Wasn't it a terrible fix, Dick? What could I do or say? The only thing that occurred to me was to declare the telegram was intended for you!"

"What does he want telegrams sent to him under an assumed name for?" asked Mr. Armstrong, cunningly and shrewdly. Then, with an air of revelation, he burst out. "I half suspect it comes from that runaway brother of his who tried to murder his partner in the City, and whom the police are after!"

Worse and worse! I felt the ground giving under my feet. And I did a desperate thing. The telegram was standing up against the mirror on the mantelpiece. I ran across the room, and, before Mr. Armstrong knew what I was after, possessed myself of it, and thrust it in my pocket.

"Good heavens," he cried, "are you going to steal it!"

"It is Mr. Richard Fawcitt's property," I retorted, "and it is you who want to steal it."

"But it is addressed to my care."

"I don't care," was my womanly answer, "I've got it and I am going to keep it and—and send it on to Mr. Fawcitt in—in Jamaica."

"If you were not a lady," he said, "I would force you to give it up."

"And if you were not a beast, you wouldn't treat an unprotected girl, with a sick brother to

nurse, as you have treated me," and walked out of the room in as stately a manner as I could command.

Five minutes afterwards I heard him ring his bell, and up came young Pugh. "Come in here before you go upstairs," I whispered to him. He whipped in and I explained the situation in a few hurried words, and impressed upon him the absolute necessity of telling Mr. Armstrong that Mr. Richard Fawcitt had ordered him to collect and forward any letters addressed to John Lock that might come to Mr. Armstrong's care during his absence. He acted on his instructions as well as he could, but he couldn't convince Mr. Armstrong—the pig-headed, obstinate man! And he told Pugh the whole thing was incomprehensible and very, very suspicious, and he should consult the police!

Oh, Dick, Dick, you don't know what I suffered. First of all there was your telegram, asking if Robert was in a place of safety, and why I had not written. And I had written to you sheets and sheets, to John Lock, care of Cook & Sons, Bombay! Robert was distracted when he realised that you had not received any of his or my letters, and in his feeble state of health it gave him such a shock that he had to take to his bed again. Then there was the dread of the police coming in to make inquiries—and how to answer them! Luckily, Mr. Armstrong did not do anything on the spur of the moment. Pugh and I were watching his movements and correspondence closely. In my bewilderment the only thing I could think of was to make a move, and I cabled out to you that message that we were "in urgent danger" and "hoped to escape next week." I did really think at the moment of sending it that Robert was in urgent danger, and it wasn't till I grew calmer, and Mr. Armstrong seemed to be doing nothing, that I realised I might have been over-timid, and had

probably caused you no end of anxiety. So I tried to put matters right a week later by cabling another message to the effect that "Danger is past. We are still at your flat in Wybrow Street—Edith." But I suppose you never got that message?

(Dick shook his head in the negative, but did not speak, fearing to interrupt her in her narrative, which he was following with rapt attention.)

I guessed as much when we got no reply from you. And then I had a premonition that something had happened. And, strangely enough, Robert had exactly the same premonition. A dual conception like that often happens when two people are desperately in love with one another (she confessed with charming candour).

Then we both took to worrying about you, dear old Dick—I mean, worrying even more than we had been doing. And Robert said, decidedly, "I am going to give myself up. I believe something has happened to Dick. He has been taken. And if he has I know nothing will induce him to give us away."

"You shall, Robert," I said, "only you must wait until there is time for an Indian mail to arrive since the receipt of my telegram to him." For, you see, Dick, we hadn't heard from you for a long time. I know now it was owing to your being in Ramjugger and your illness, but the sudden cessation of correspondence after you had left Bombay, and the knowledge your Bombay letters conveyed that you had lost all your money in a shipwreck and wanted a supply, naturally gave us a terrible shock. We sent you three-quarters of what you had left Robert—three hundred pounds, and I suppose it is lying at Messrs. Cook & Sons', waiting for John Lock to call for it! Oh, what a dreadful, dreadful bungle I made of it! But then, women are no good at business, and never were!

Well, I persuaded Robert to give in to me. He was to wait until to-day, when the Indian mail is due, and if we did not hear from you a full and satisfactory explanation, he was to surrender himself, and I was to cable out to Bombay and cause an advertisement to be inserted in all the papers telling "John Bolt" and "Robert Fawcitt" what you had done! That is the truth, Dick, and I am thankful now that my dear Robert had the determination and strength of mind to insist on a line of action from which, up to the very last moment, weak, frightened woman that I was, I tried to dissuade him.

And then, last week, we opened the morning papers one day, and there was an account of your trial at Bow Street!

Robert saw it first, and it sent him off into a dead faint. He is still so weak and lacking power! And when he came to himself he wanted to go and give himself up at once. But luckily Dr. Milsom, whom I had hurriedly summoned, would not allow him to do so, and after a regular fight of an argument we came to a compromise that if Robert would stop in bed and let us nurse him, he and I should give ourselves up—he on the capital, I on the accessory charge—the first day that Dr. Milsom said he could do so without serious danger to his health.

And that was only yesterday! You may wonder why we did not communicate with you, Dick, in the interim. Well, for my part, I frankly confess I was ashamed to; I thought you would despise me so.

"Oh, Edith, dearest," broke in Dick, hurriedly and reproachfully, "have you not a better opinion of me than that? Could you think I could be anything but thrilled by your noble, unselfish conduct?"

You dear Dick! Don't, don't say such things about me. I ought not to have hindered Robert in doing what was right when he first saw his duty

clear. But a woman who loves a man—oh, she is very fond and foolish—very fondly foolish! She can do wicked things and think them good!

And now, Dick, you know —

* * * * *

At which moment Edith's story was interrupted by the sudden entry of Mrs. Pugh.

"There's a young lady wants to see you particularly, Miss," she said. "She won't give her name, but she says she knows Mr. Richard Fawcitt."

Dick leaped to his feet, and made for the door. But before he could reach it someone entered the room—someone travel-stained and exhausted from a long and rapid journey in the Brindisi-Calais Express that carries the Indian homeward mails—someone who, with a cry of unrestrained joy and emotion, flung herself into his arms, and sobbed out,

"Oh, my darling, darling Richard!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LILY—WILLY-NILLY.

WIILLY-NILLY, I must write of Lily Willis in this chapter, because she has stepped back into the story, and is an imperious little lady who insists upon being heard. At the same time, any immediate report of her meeting with Dick appears to me unnecessary, and I will hop lightly over the hysterical ten minutes that succeeded her entry into his flat, and the additional twenty minutes that were employed in making her better acquainted with Edith and Robert, and settling her down. And having got her on to the sofa, with Edith on one side and Dick on the other, and Robert in the comfortable arm-chair by the fire, I will proceed to synopsise her story much as I have done Edith's. Here it is :—

Well, to begin at the beginning, that day you left Gungaram, Robert—I mean Dick—I was horribly unhappy and sat in my room, crying, until Mrs. La Touche made me go out for a drive with her in the cool of the evening. She was so kind and cheered me up so much that I was quite looking forward to the morrow when I knew I should receive a telegram from you.

It came about ten o'clock and I ran off with it to my room to read. And when I read, "*Trust me, little mate—I've been in worse peril than this—The*

thought of you will pull me through," I was bewildered and frightened. "*In worse peril*"—what did that mean? "*Will pull through*"—it was an unintelligible horror. I rushed into Mrs. La Touche's room, and there she was, reading another telegram. I knew it must be from you, and I insisted on seeing its contents, although she would have withheld them from me. And her message only added to my mystification and terror. "*General Faloon, Lily's uncle, whom we thought dead, is alive, and in Bombay. Protect her from him, and do not believe all you hear about me.*"

Uncle Ferdinand alive! And Mrs. La Touche to *protect* me from him! Can you conceive what that weird warning meant to me—knowing what I knew? (She looked intently at Dick, and he returned her glance with a puzzled expression. "What did you know, Lily?" he asked).

She lowered her eyes to the ground, and made her confession.

"I knew what Uncle Ferdinand had done. I—I read those two messages you wrote when you thought you were dying in the desert. Your pocket-book had slipped out of your hand, and the pages were open, and I was so mean and wicked that I could not resist the temptation, Dick—and I hope—oh, I do hope you'll forgive me. But I was so—so jealous of Edith that I did not put your pocket-book back in your pocket, but buried it in the sand. And, oh, I'm so sorry now!"

"Poor little mate," said Dick, sadly, as he stole his arm round her waist. "You had enough to trouble and frighten you in the desert without Fate planting those despairing messages in front of your eyes! And to think that you never revealed what you had learnt!"

"But do you forgive me, Robert—Dick, I mean?

Say you forgive me!" she pleaded, "I'm so ashamed of myself."

"Lily, darling," he answered, "there is no 'forgiveness' necessary between you and me. It is I who ought to be forgiven for my abominable clumsiness, and—what shall I call it?—habitual untidiness in not putting away things when I have done with them. You'll have to cure me of that vice. And now, do go on with your story, because we are all dying to hear it."

"Dying"—echoed Edith, in a tone which was a compliment to the narrator. Whereupon Lily continued:—

Well, Mrs. La Touche was no wiser than myself! We could not telegraph to you because we did not know your address. We could only sit and speculate sorrowfully. Then a sudden thought struck me, and I cried out—"Captain Douglas knows!"

And he did know, and before another hour was over Mrs. La Touche had wormed his information out of him. Robert Bolt (my Robert—Dick, I mean) was a runaway murderer. My Dick a murderer!

I burst out laughing when Mrs. La Touche told me. Oh, such a funny laugh, which I couldn't stop. And they had to send for Dr. Slater, and he had me put to bed, and, oh—I don't know what happened for the next three days.

When I came to my senses I had no inclination to laugh, only cry, cry, cry all day long. And dear Mrs. La Touche sitting by my bedside, looking horribly unhappy, just as people do when they are holding back bad news. I saw there was bad news. It was in the *Times of India*, and I made her bring it to me, and read it right through. And then I felt happier, because you had telegraphed to me you had been in worse peril and would pull through. And I

knew *whatever* you said you would do, would be done.

There was only one thing troubled me. I knew you had no money. I asked Mr. La Touche if lawyers were expensive, and he said they cost more than a *prima donna*, and did nothing without a refresher, which had to be paid in advance. Oh, dear me, I knew lawyers were rogues, but I never thought they were robbers! And from what Mr. La Touche told me, it seemed to me that one ought to have a lawyer to defend one against lawyers' charges. And that would be like a snowball subscription for a wicked end!

Well, of course, I had to do something! You had told me, Dick, I was a rich heiress, and there was the diamond and ruby necklace. I got an estimate from Mr. La Touche for "feeing" lawyers, which he thought would come to a thousand pounds. Then I showed Mrs. La Touche my necklace which my sister had left me, and told her, and Mr. La Touche got a native banker in the bazaar to advance twenty thousand rupees upon its security. Out of that I arranged to have one thousand pounds cabled home to Messrs. Fox and Blackett, who were supposed to be the sharpest lawyers in London, with instructions to engage the very best Counsel to defend you.

"So it was you, little mate!" exclaimed Dick, rapturously. "I never dreamt of it! Turn your head away. Bob. I *must* give her a kiss for this!"

"For shame!" cried Lily, blushing very rosily and prettily, "you will shock Edith."

But so far from being shocked, Edith gave her a kiss too!

And then this much-be-kissed girl managed to continue her story.

No sooner had I borrowed and despatched the money, and made arrangements to go home by the next steamer (I had nearly £350 left out of my twenty thousand rupees) than there came two shocks one upon the other. Shock number one, Uncle Ferdinand's death from the plague in Bombay; and shock number two, the arrival of Baboo Hurry Lal, accusing me of stealing the Rajah's state necklace. That was at midday on the fifth day after you left, Dick. And the mail steamer in which I was going to sail for England timed to start the day after the morrow!

No—I wasn't a bit frightened. I remembered Tom Bobus, and I told Mr. La Touche all about him. And then I remembered your pocket-book, Dick, and I knew the contents of that would refute the vile lying stories Baboo Hurry Lal was swearing to, that although my Aunt was now really dead, she was alive when you and I "eloped," and had actually been killed by a sunstroke when she had gone out with one of the parties in search of us!

"Take me to Ramjugger," I said, "Mr. Tom Bobus gave me the necklace; he will explain my possession of it. And there is a pocket-book of Mr. Bolt's buried by the skeleton of a camel under a very tall sand-hill in the desert, about due south of the half-way well. If I can find that sand-hill I will prove to you that my dear Aunt was dead—poisoned before Mr. Bolt and I left Ramjugger. And we shall find out the truth about the Ranee Rosalie, who this man says is alive."

The Baboo turned a ripe-pumpkin colour. "Too long journey for pretty Mees. Let General Faloon come make enquiry."

"General Faloon!" exclaimed Mr. La Touche; "why, we have just had a telegram to say that he is dead of the plague."

"De General dead!" gasped the Baboo. "Oh, poor pretty Mees, poor pretty Mees! You in mourning now! No can trouble you with business. Never mind necklace. I explain to Rajah. Rajah him have fit when he hear General Faloon dead. Oh, bad news, bad news! But no matter necklace—no matter whatsomever!"

"On the contrary," said Mr. La Touche, "it matters a very great deal. I begin to see now that probably murder has been committed."

"Good morning, Sir. Good morning, pretty Mees. Me plenty hurry," cried the Baboo in an agitated voice, as he tried to retire.

But Mr. La Touche would not let him go, and sent for Captain Douglas, who on hearing my story (which no one had hitherto believed) arrested Hurry Lal and begged me to accompany him to Ramjugger if I felt able to do so. He was most polite, and apologised for not having acted on my information sooner, but humbly begged to be allowed to make amends for what he had done, and humbly hoped I would help him to "pull off a big case against the biggest scoundrel in Rajputana."

I consulted with Mr. La Touche, and found out that by going home overland *via* Brindisi, I could arrive at the same time as if I went by the sea route in the steamer in which I had booked my passage. So I consented to return to Ramjugger on the condition that perfect arrangements should be made for me to catch the next mail steamer.

It was a great journey. Mr. La Touche and Dr. Slater came with us, and Baboo Hurry Lal was taken along, a close prisoner. The poor man was dripping perspiration the whole way, and every time I passed near him he tumbled down and kissed my feet! It was really most uncomfortable—having one's feet kissed by a man whose natural habit was

so exceedingly fat and pompous. He carried it to extremities.

I see you are getting tired—

("No! No!" from everyone in chorus.)

Well, I am, and I must hurry on with my story. We took Ramjugger by surprise, the Rajah was arrested, and dear Aunt's and my dear sister's death confirmed. That horrid, lean native doctor confessed they had both been poisoned by order of the Rajah, and that a reward of ten thousand rupees had been offered to the man who assassinated my Dick, without implicating the Rajah. And last of all there was Tom Bobus confined in a dungeon, and doomed to death. He was released, told of his interview with the Ranee Dewali, she was questioned, and the whole truth about the diamond and ruby necklace and Rosalie's will came out.

They are all going to be tried for murder, Dick, and Aunt and Rosalie will be avenged!

All this occurred on the third day after leaving Gungaram. That evening we were to start back for the railway, but instead of going direct I begged Mr. La Touche to try and let me find the sand-hill under which your pocket-book was buried. Tom Bobus came with us, and drove Bijli, on which I was mounted (side saddle, Dick: a special one of Rosalie's). I think Bijli must have remembered the previous journey, for, so far as I could remember, he went over the same course, and in the early morning of the fourth day I recognised the sand-hill, which was very familiar to me as I had impressed its peculiar shape on my mind that morning I laboured back to you, dragging Bijli after me.

"And now, Dick, dear," said Lily, drawing a little package out of the bosom of her dress, "I make restitution. There is your pocket-book—only you've got to send or take it back to Bombay, in case it is

wanted as evidence. But I'll speak to you about that presently."

Meanwhile, let me briefly mention that we reached and camped at the half-way well that day, and were back at Gungaram the next morning, when I had six hours' lovely rest (which I wanted ! Oh, my poor spine and Bijli's rocky hump !) and I caught the steamer splendidly. Mr. and Mrs. La Touche came to see me off, and Mr. Tom Bobus too. I have promised to lend Mr. Bobus five thousand rupees when I come into my fortune, to start as a horse-dealer in Bombay. Of course I shall give it him, but he insists upon calling and considering it a loan !

And now you know how I have come here—

"Indeed I don't," declared Dick. "That you should walk into this flat in the way you did is nothing short of a miracle."

"Oh, I forgot."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CLEARS UP THE MYSTERY.

A SHOWER of rain, breaking up a pleasant picnic at the end of the day and drenching the guests, could not have a more disturbing influence than Lily's concluding announcement that she was returning to Bombay in (as it happened) six days. The news fell with a shock upon Dick, who felt a sudden fetter placed on his new-found happiness, whilst in intuitive sympathy with him, Edith and Robert looked at one another and did not seek to hide their dismay.

"Lily," said Dick, "this is dreadful news—your going back to Bombay."

"Oh, but you will come with me, Dick—won't you? Mrs. La Touche put me in charge of the dear old Captain of the steamer coming home, and he arranged everything—escort and all, so comfortably. But there is no one to put me in charge of anyone for the return voyage, and I don't think, under the circumstances, Dick, you would like me to sail without you?" And she looked at him with a little surprised anxiety in her blue, perplexed eyes.

Dick brightened visibly, then grew very red in the face, and finally delivered himself of a cough.

"Well, sir?" demanded Lily, indicating disapproval of his tardiness in answering.

"Why, of course; certainly, darling," Dick hastened to assure her. "You don't imagine, having once got you into my arms, I am going to let you slip away for a second. The only—h'm—question is, in what capacity should I accompany you?"

"In the capacity of Dick this time," decided Lily, not apprehending the ultimate reach of his speculation. "However I am going to get out of the way of calling you 'Robert,' I don't know. But perhaps a long sea-voyage in your company will cure me."

With such incorrigible innocence Dick felt helpless. He looked at Edith, and then at Robert. And, curiously enough, both of them blushed just as guiltily as Dick himself—but for a different reason.

And then his *savoir-faire* came suddenly back to Dick, and he rose to the height of the occasion and to his feet. And, standing by the side of Robert's chair, he began to make a sort of speech, that did not appear to have the remotest connection with the subject perplexing them.

"Dear ones," he said, and looked at each of them in turn, "I do think we four people are the most unconventional in the world. If, for instance, Mrs. Grundy entered the room at this moment, I feel convinced that she would dash out again with the celerity that might be actuated and accelerated by such a fact as our burning cayenne pepper in the apartment. Perhaps, however, you do not know that the fumes of burning cayenne pepper are the most unbearable in the world. I was speaking in the language of metaphor, my desire being to illustrate the intolerability of our hardened unconventionality. In this respect it is my opening axiom that we are 'abandoned.'"

Edith, Lily, and Robert looked exceedingly puzzled; but such was the love of all three of them

for Dick, and such their regard for his sagacity and mental power, that they hesitated to ask him what he was drivelling about.

Encouraged by their acquiescence in the fundamental truth of his argument, Dick went on :

“ It is hardly necessary for me to explain or expatiate on the fact that we are two young women under twenty-four (a good deal under, in one case) and two young men under thirty. That we are spinsters and bachelors, and that two of us are longing to marry two others of us. The question is, whether the two others of us are—what shall I say?—graciously willing to marry the two of us.”

“ Of course they are,” said Lily.

“ We lay another fundamental truth on the top of the previous fundamental truth,” went on Dick, exegetically, “ and the edifice begins to rear its head. The next question is, ‘ Forthwith?’ ”

Neither Edith nor Lily could quite make out the bearings of that question, which was put in rather an involved way. Their knitted brows indicated this.

“ I perceive,” said Dick, after a little pause, and in a tone tinged with disappointment, “ that you do not take me. Perhaps the fault is mine, for using involved diction in the heat of oratory. So I will repeat the question in a simpler and clearer form: Are you, the other two, ready and willing to marry us two forthwith?”

Whereat Lily simply gave a shriek (of delight, although she pretended it was dismay), and Edith said, rather severely, that Dick ought to be ashamed of himself for making light of such solemn matters.

“ Oh, but I’m not,” protested Dick, in a tone of excessive exculpation. “ I was never solemner or seriouser in my life! Let me square and fit the third fundamental truth. I presume to take it as Q.E.D.

that the other two of us are not opposed in principle to marrying the two of us, and that the formal and conventional equation is the only one that stands in the way. But you have admitted—or, at least, I have admitted on your behalf—that we are the most unconventional four in the world, and that Mrs. Grundy would flee from us as she would from the fiend. Accursed murderers, accursed accessories to murder, accursed thief of a diamond and ruby necklace, how can we mingle in the honest world? And living together, as we have done for long periods, and met here together without chaperon and without convention, how can we dare to enter into select society or expect its members to come to our Wedding Feast?"

Dick paused, and looked triumphantly at his audience. But no one had anything to say, except in blushes.

"On the top of this," went on Dick, following up his histrionic advantage, "there is one imperious little lady here who insists upon going out to Bombay next Friday, and upon my accompanying her. But in what capacity she has omitted to specify."

Lily began to see now, and she unconsciously crept closer to Edith, and finally buried her blushing face in her future sister's bosom.

"It will be convenient," said Dick, with a twinkle of humour in his handsome grey eyes, "to continue the argument under less complex circumstances. Robert, old fellow, will you stop in this room and convince Edith of its cogency, whilst I take Lily into the dining-room and strive to persuade her to our ends."

"But what is the precise argument, Dick?" asked Robert.

"That, under the peculiar circumstances of our unconventional association, it is advisable—and,

indeed, unavoidable—that we should all be married next week; so that I may escort Lily to Bombay, and Edith may take you to Buxton to regain your health."

"Oh!" cried Lily.

"Oh!" cried Edith.

But, all the same, the former made no objection to Dick leading her into the next room, and Edith's eyes invited Robert to take the vacant seat on the sofa.

* * * * *

On Wednesday, Dick and Lily and Edith and Robert were married. The witnesses to the ceremony were Mrs. Pugh, Dr. Milsom, and—Detective Lowe! The latter had happened to come in, just as they were driving off to church, to "wish his very best to Mr. Richard Fawcitt," and had forthwith been requisitioned as a wedding-guest whom it would not be necessary to illuminate as to the antecedents of the principal actors in the function.

"You can witness both Robert and Richard Fawcitt's signatures, can't you, Lowe?" said Dick.
"You know them both well—eh?"

"Oh, get out with you, sir!" protested the honest sergeant. "Won't you ever have done joking me?"

The unconventional marriage of four unconventional people does not give much scope to the story-writer to describe dresses or emotions. As for the former, they were distinctly unconventional; but, for the latter, I think they were as heartfelt as any that ever accompanied those fatal words "Will you?"—"I will!" Lily was, perhaps, the heroine of the occasion, though Edith nearly ran her a dead heat. Robert followed a very fair third, and Dick distinguished himself by a distressing nervousness, and came in a bad last.

The wedding-breakfast took place at Dick's flat, being supplied by a universal provider, who lamented he had not been able to add a touch of perfection to the recherché repast by decorating it with a dozen hired guests. But Dick—who paid the piper—absolutely refused such desperate bargains as—“an elderly gentleman to give the blessing, with ducal features and guaranteed sound in his ‘h's,’ half-a-guinea;” “a benevolent aunt, in handsome mauve silk dress, well-rehearsed in portraying the family benefactress, from whom there are great expectations, seven-and-sixpence, or, with real Brussels lace flounces to dress, nine shillings;” “young walking gentlemen, look as though they had means, strictly forbidden to borrow from genuine guests, six shillings each, four for a guinea;” “bridesmaids, assorted, five guineas a dozen—extra fine, six pounds ten;” “street admirers (decently dressed), to say ‘Oh-h-h’ in fireworks-going-off ‘tone’ when the bride steps out of her carriage to enter the church, or exclaim ‘sweetly pretty’ as she leaves home in her going-away dress; males, one shilling an hour each; females, 8½d. per hour; reduction on a large quantity.”

“No,” said Dick, with something of his old determination; “none of these pomps and vanities for me. Not at any price.”

So there were only Dr. Milsom and Lowe at table (the latter highly honoured by Dick's condescension); and the former proposed the healths of Edith and Robert and the latter the healths of Lily and Dick, and Mrs. Pugh did the Greek chorus, with young Pugh out in the passage and Mr. Armstrong on the landing above arguing about the rights of tenants to be convivial.

“Don't happen every day,” was young Pugh's excuse, as custodian of the flats for the landlord;

"and when you're married, sir, you shall have a German band in, and no objections raised."

* * * * *

And so they are married and done for, and it only remains for me to get them their cabs and start them off to their respective railway stations. Dr. Milsom, as Robert's best man, did the needful for Mr. and Mrs. Robert Fawcitt, and Lowe was highly honoured and gratified to stand holding the door open to allow Mr. and Mrs. Richard Fawcitt to take their seats *en route* to Paris.

"Half a mo', sir," he whispered to Dick, through the open window, after he had closed the door; "there's a little matter that keeps me awake o' nights for worrying over it. That telegram from Algiers to Scotland Yard, what put us on your track—you said you suspected who it was as sent it. I'd take it kindly of you, sir, if you'd tell me."

And Dick looked at him and winked—sufficiently!

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